

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker

**Arab working
class can win a
Palestinian state**

- ISN disintegration
- Hopi school
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- Middle East revisited

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**Dieudonné's
calculated
anti-Semitism**

LETTERS



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

Flipping a coin

Those working in comics or film certainly couldn't construct a better 'two-face' than Richard Seymour. In recent months, the poster child of the Socialist Workers Party opposition has been testing his luck with the forces of political chance.

Formerly coming out of the corner of the British Cliffties, the self-described author decidedly changed his tune during the second-period intermission. Those of us who have been long-time observers of the political zig-zags in the reformist camp weren't surprised to see Seymour duck the punches of his former mentors in the SWP, while he abandoned ship on the organisation he had religiously defended up to that point without any peep of protest. While the notion that the SWP magically became a bureaucratically warped organisation seemingly overnight due to the mishandling of rape allegations within the organisation might seem outlandish, it was no laughing matter to those who would go on to form the International Socialist Network. Making a career out of aligning with identity politics and 'intersectionality', Seymour seemed to have hoped that the coin would continue to fall heads side up. And it had - until now.

This time, fate had his number. A recent debacle took place on the Facebook page of a leader of the ISN. The instrument that had reaped so many rewards for these latter-day rebels proved to bury those who lacked prowess in handling the fairy tale that is online politics. Ideologically, Facebook allows pseudo-Marxists and all of their hangers-on to perpetuate allegedly open arguments that are actually structured to their benefit, flowered with all the language of 'safe spaces' that have become so popular these days at the expense of any real political integrity. Whereas those attending political meetings that tend to be breeding grounds for interventions from the Spartacist League could traditionally only sing a tune with their fingers in their ears, now the 'unfriend' button has become the fundamental object and means of criticism. This supplements the discussions on left unity that have become so rampant in the UK, with an organisation titled by the same name and precious talks between fragmented opportunist organisations like Workers Power, which are actually just farces in the making. Just as sects across the globe seek to latch on to the movement of the day, so have these latter-day reformists jumped the wagon of talks of unity on the left, seeking to intersperse their generic brand of orthodoxy which will inevitably lead to more crying, but certainly not political clarity.

Building upon this house of cards, Workers Power and their phony League for the Fifth International (LSI) have all but begged Seymour's ISN and the broad umbrella Anti-Capitalist Initiative to lend credibility to their tiny, irrelevant sect. However, in an article titled 'Revolutionary unity must be built on firm foundations', the ostensible Trotskyists of the LSI utterly fail to question the social basis of women's oppression, let alone discuss the shortcomings of bourgeois feminism and pressure politics. Instead, liquidationism is the slogan of the day. Whereas intersectionality becomes the clarion call of the ISN's cohorts, Workers Power sings a tune of watering down political differences.

For Marxists, phony unity is not the means of advancing the class struggle and the battle against oppression, but instead political clarity is paramount. No amount of veneer can hide this fact from both groups, including Workers Power, which is quite fond of using the language of Marxism in asking questions about the revolutionary party, programme and the socialist transformation of society.

However, this veil is exposed as ripped and torn when it becomes apparent that the LSI has no interest of making a critique of the reformist political history of the SWP or the ISN, but instead seeks to accommodate to their capitulationist sloganeering. They wouldn't dare raise a peep to offend those they need so desperately to continue treading the path of phony unity on the left amongst utterly different political projects, visions and structures for a post-capitalist society.

Perhaps Workers Power is apprehensive about investigating the political history of the Cliffties for fear that their own opportunism will be exposed. Both tendencies played a significant part in hailing the counterrevolutionary wave that destroyed the Soviet Union, the former lauding the development as a victory for 'authentic socialism' and the latter lining Yeltsin's barricades. In truth, both groups are already quite united in practice, taking up residence in the same swamp of anti-Marxism that they'd prefer to forget.

In regards to political programme and Marxist content, there is little the ISN and its starry-eyed supporters don't seek to liquidate. You'd be hard pressed to find many in their organisational circles who uphold even elementary Marxist principles, let alone the urgent proclamation made by Trotsky that "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership." Whereas the Bolshevik leader urged a turn to the proletariat, these forces have made a turn to the internet, as there is no better way to marginalise political discourse contemporarily than to delete a post. These alleged 'safe spaces' are actually hotbeds of apoliticality. Instead, bourgeois feminism is on the menu today, as opposed to a fundamental understanding of, say, the Bolshevik experience and actually applying a programme for women's liberation. And Seymour and co gladly eat until their plates are spotless.

This is why it comes as no surprise that Seymour and all of his cronies failed such a basic litmus test as dealing with a blatantly racist advertisement. Taking pages from the postmodernist handbook, which apparently all of these folks receive upon making the jump from pseudo-Marxist identification to transparent identity politics, the ISN and its Facebook observers were thrown into a frenzy in attempting to understand how their brand of moralism must respond to the blatantly and intentionally provocative marketing scheme. It appeared that Seymour found himself between a hard place and a crock of shit, subtly smashed between the contradictions of how a proponent of intersectionality should comprehend racist overtones while still sprinkling in pieces of a semi-Marxist analysis. The shovel he had used to dig deeper the grave of authentic Marxism came back to strike him in the hands of others.

Using the building blocks of the Avakianites and their rabid anti-sex, anti-porn campaigns, moral policing appears to be the order of the day. The pseudo-left (from the ISN to their mother organisation and countless others who prostrate on the altar of movementist politics) seeks to build a church of purity, not authentically concerned with questions of women's and sexual liberation. Instead of focusing their crosshairs on breaking tradition's fetters and putting forward a radical rupture with the bourgeois state's claims regarding sexual normalcy and virtue, they instead capitulate to this brutal capitalist system and all the atrocities this entails.

There's a reason an article on the *Lenin's Tomb* blog titled "The point of intersection" doesn't mention the working class, let alone proletarian revolution or how to build a party to contribute to the process of distilling political programme in the interest of making it happen. What's most touching is Seymour's recent book *Unhitched*, which lambasts the late Christopher Hitchens for all of his capitulations to imperialism

and bourgeois ideology. All the while Seymour literally kisses his footsteps one by one on the same path to accepting the brutal capitalist present and instead casting a veil of liberal ignorance over the contradictions.

Corey Ansel
Columbus, Ohio

Stalinist?

One of our comrades in Communist Students recently went through something with which many comrades in and around CS and/or the CPGB will doubtless be familiar: being courted by leading members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the search for new recruits to pick off.

Of course, one-to-one meetings and telephone conversations offer a certain 'safe space' within which to defend the indefensible - namely this outfit's social-imperialism and sectoid programmophobia - away from the prying eyes of public polemic, exchange and factual material. In this meeting, the usual weasel words were set out in defence of the AWL's hideous record in the recent past, such as, *inter alia*: a refusal to call for the withdrawal of the imperialist forces occupying Iraq, a softness towards the possibility of a "surgical strike" against Iranian nuclear facilities, the support for/refusal to condemn the bombing of Libya and so on. In a commonly used analogy, our AWL executive committee member argued that, while he was, of course, against the police, if he were to be mugged then his slogan would not be 'Police scum, off our streets', now, would it? (In the AWL's warped world view, occupying imperialist forces in Iraq are claimed to have acted as some kind of law enforcement agency to 'protect' the poor, benighted civilians from the muggers and thieves embodied by the reactionary Islamist militias.) We have exposed such imperialist apologia on many occasions - not least by pointing to the fact that the real legacy of the US/UK occupation has been a religious sectarian regime set up by the occupying forces themselves.

What really bemused me, however, was when I learnt from my accosted comrade that the AWL to this day insists on referring to the CPGB as a *Stalinist* organisation. While I had come across such accusations in the past, particularly from the rather marked figure of Sacha Ismail outside a student bar when I was an undergraduate in 2003, I have not heard any AWL member publicly championing such a hideously absurd point of view for quite some time. I sincerely thought it had been buried, never to be mentioned again. But I really should have been less naive.

Almost as if we had not already dealt with the AWL's pitiful accusations, point by point, in a polemic from the early 2000s, the AWL comrade in question claimed that the 'Stalinism' of the CPGB supposedly manifests itself in the approach of the comrades who later founded the CPGB to the Afghani Saur revolution of 1978 (!) and our assertion (paraphrasing Lenin, by the way) that "Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything".

The conclusions drawn by the AWL are, frankly, bonkers. After all, ask even the Spartiest of Sparts about the nature of the project of the *Weekly Worker* and they would be very hard pressed to describe it as "Stalinist". We know the AWL comrades closely study the *Weekly Worker* every Thursday, so why do they seem to fail to notice the extensive work our group has been part of to *deepen* the study of Bolshevism, democratic centralism, the Marxist programme and so on, where we have tackled head on many of the sectoid/cold war myths of even the formally anti-Stalinist currents on the British left?

Yet in typically sectarian fashion, the organisation eschews a serious engagement with our theoretical output and its evolution in the name of

indoctrinating its members to go out and build their organisation at the expense of anything even approaching a scientific, rigorous and honest approach to the world around them.

The AWL's own positions and politics suffer for it too. Take its understanding of so-called "ultra-imperialism", the "imperialism of free trade" it developed at the turn of the century, according to which the United States and its allies would, in their own interests and in a ham-fisted way, "remake" the Middle East into a region fit for the blossoming of bourgeois democracy, capitalist social relations and routine trade unionism. The redevelopment of Japan and West Germany after World War II was cited as an analogy. Yet now, after what we have seen? The legacy of US/UK intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, etc has been social chaos, fragmentation and disintegration, not *Pax Americana*, liberal democracy and order. Of the AWL's several absurd positions and *points d'honneur*, this is surely the one that is most at odds with reality. Yet it appears that, with a few exceptions, nobody in the organisation has even raised a peep against such fantasy politics.

Are the comrades such hidebound sectarians that they do not understand the certain irony associated with accusing an organisation of 'Stalinism' and arguing in such a patently backhanded and mendacious fashion? If it were not so *typical* of the kind of political methods and the almost cringe-worthy absence of political ambition on the British far left, then such semi-religious methods might merely be laughed at.

Ben Lewis
South Wales

No humour

I read the letter in last week's paper from the exasperated proponents of Left Unity's Republican Socialist Platform - Phil Vellender, Russell Caplan and my old comrade from the Commune, Javaad Alipoor - with some bemusement, I have to say.

Apparently, in a dastardly plot to make the RS platform look like "fascists", the phrase, 'No platform', was inserted above their previous letter to the *Weekly Worker* (December 19). Personally, I think this is more likely to be an ironic reference to the fact that the platform has now closed down.

It is, of course, the prerogative of the editors of the *Weekly Worker* to choose whatever headline they like for articles and letters in the paper. In the case of letters these are generally only two or three words, as they're meant to only occupy one line. The original heading quoted by the comrades, "Republican Socialist Platform statement on LU conference (2013)", wasn't exactly catchy and probably would have taken up three. Needless to say, the choice of words was a bit of a joke, but "using underhand methods redolent with the worst activities of the Stalinists"? What, the gulags? The purges? The liquidation of the kulaks? I don't think so, comrades. More like a major sense of humour failure on your part.

In any case, having taken a look at the platform, I have to say it is not exactly an inspiring basis for a new political party. When you're putting forward a platform for a socialist party, surely you have to make clear your vision of an alternative society. The comrades are correct to try to focus on *political* demands instead of falling into the usual economism of the rest of the left, but to restrict your stated aims to "radical change, a new democratic constitution and a social republic" is seriously lacking, to say the least.

Why you would put that forward instead of joining the Communist Platform is beyond me really. Not voting for the CP at the Left Unity founding conference clearly demonstrates how soft your commitment to the real political legacy of the Levellers, Diggers and

radical Chartists must be in practice. I'm particularly sad to see Javaad defending this nonsense, as I remember him being one of the more serious and clued-up communists in my old group. Dear oh dear. Anyway, I like the Bradford podcasts, so keep them up.

Daniel Harvey
Kent

Creature comfort

Of all the bizarre attempts to claim Marxism, probably none is surpassed by the animal rights 'movement' ('Animal liberation and communism', January 23). It is not an exaggeration to say that Marxism is diametrically opposed to pretty much everything that 'animal rights' and its allied environmentalism stand for.

It's worth reminding ourselves that Marx had no time at all for his nature-cultist contemporaries. In response to the nature-worshipper, Daumer, he said: "... modern natural science ... with modern industry, has revolutionised the whole of nature and put an end to man's childish attitude towards nature as well as to other forms of childishness ... it would be desirable that Bavaria's sluggish peasant economy, the ground on which grow priests and Daumers alike, should at last be ploughed up by modern cultivation and modern machines" (K Marx *CW* Vol 10, pp241-46).

Modern eco-warriors like to romanticise pre-capitalist cultures which idolised animals. But Marx criticised the Indian caste system for producing a "brutalising worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow" (*CW* Vol 12, p125).

It's also clear that Marx would have looked positively (though, of course, not uncritically) at the profound modern progress of agricultural technique. As he said in the *Grundrisse*, "economy ultimately reduces itself" to the "economy of time". Thus, "The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle, etc, the more time it wins for other production, material or mental."

Marxist criticisms of environmentalism and the so-called rights of animals are often caricatured as belonging to a 'productivist' Stalinism. But it was Trotsky who most forcefully emphasised the 'anthropocentrism' of Marxism:

"Through the machine, man in socialist society will command nature in its entirety, with its grouse and its sturgeons. He will point out places for mountains and for passes. He will change the course of the rivers, and he will lay down rules for the oceans. The idealist simpletons may say that this will be a bore, but that is why they are simpletons. Of course, this does not mean that the entire globe will be marked off into boxes, that the forests will be turned into parks and gardens. Most likely, thickets and forests and grouse and tigers will remain, but only where man commands them to remain. And man will do it so well that the tiger won't even notice the machine, or feel the change, but will live as he lived in primeval times.

"The machine is not in opposition to the earth. The machine is the instrument of modern man in every field of life. The present-day city is transient. But it will not be dissolved back again into the old village. On the contrary, the village will rise in fundamentals to the plane of the city. Here lies the principal task. The city is transient, but it points to the future, and indicates the road. The present village is entirely of the past" (L Trotsky *Literature and revolution* 1924).

For Marxists, the goal of socialism is to increase humanity's command of nature, not decrease it. To paraphrase Lenin, socialism is workers' power plus technological progress. Marxism is not reconcilable with the petty bourgeois, irrationalist hogwash of 'animal rights'. The socialism

‘conceived’ by Marxists aims to increase human mastery of nature, not “like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature” (Engels), but by learning and mastering its laws in order that they can be better manipulated in the interests of human progress.

Mark Adams
 email

Bleak beliefs

The comrades interviewed in last week’s paper raised the question of animal rights in a way that I have never seen the left even bother to cover before. However, I find something of the whiff of puritanism about their position that communism seems to be one of a stoical, rational ‘common sense’ - communism on a relentless diet of nut cutlets, vegetable surprises and faux meat-flavoured sausages - because it is efficient.

I concede, of course, that it is true we could eat the food we use to fatten up animals for slaughter, but by the same argument we could drink the water we use to make beer or Coca Cola. Shall we abolish the brewery under communism?

There is for me no point in communism if it doesn’t embrace the pleasures of life and creates a society in which we can all indulge in the delights of life if we choose to, regardless of how inefficient and indulgent that lifestyle may be.

The prospect of a vegan communist future is a bleak one, as is the supposed rejection of belief in technological advance that I find in many of the left these days. But we may well be able to have our beef and eat it on this one.

Lab experiments have grown in vitro meat - basically, meat without growing the animal - that potentially could produce meat, save half on the energy needed, emit substantially less methane and free up some 99% of farmland for reuse. The tech is still primitive, but promising - promising enough that we can expect capital to invest in it over coming years and attempt to make a viable commodity of it in their dash to make a hippy-friendly profit that will make communism even more of a practical solution to keeping the human animal alive.

John Masters
 Essex

Maximum wage

I don’t quite understand the howls of protest from some extremely rich businessmen over Labour’s commitment to reinstate the 50p tax rate for salaries over £150,000. If, as they complain, the new rate will hardly raise any new revenue, just what are they whining about? If that was true, Labour’s response should be twofold. Firstly, end all the various loopholes and dodges which enable the very wealthy to avoid paying tax, including counting capital gains and share allocations as income and, secondly, impose the 50p rate at a much lower level - eg, £100,000 - so it would indeed raise some serious additional revenue.

At the same time, perhaps we ought to be looking at a maximum as well as a minimum wage, if we are serious about creating a more just and fairer society. Ten times the current minimum wage would be £123,000 and five times the average salary would be £133,000. No-one’s labour can genuinely be worth more than 10 times that of someone else.

It is surely obvious that wages in excess of these limits are nothing to do with the cost of reproducing labour-power and probably represent drawings down of surplus value created by workers. These are often set without reference to ‘market forces’ and often just reflect the public image the company wants to portray to the rest of the capitalist class.

An income range of 10:1 would provide plenty of incentives for people to work hard, improve their skills and qualifications, and make a socially valuable contribution to society. One could argue that a range of 5:1 would also provide adequate incentive, and perhaps

we should move to that over time.

Yes, the filthy rich will howl in protest and will use their mass media to great effect. But those who will be affected by such a cap represent no more than 1.5% of all taxpayers, and will bear down most heavily on just 0.5% of taxpayers. Labour should be brave and do the electoral maths. We are many, they are few.

Andrew Northall
 Kettering

Credit points

Work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith appears before the parliamentary select committee on February 3 to answer more questions on universal credit.

Having spoken to several claimants in Rugby since the universal credit pilot started here in late November, we have a number of points we would like to put to him. We have been regularly leafleting outside Rugby job centre, and the introduction of universal credit is already making a difficult situation even worse for a number of claimants. These are amongst the examples of the problems claimants are facing, which we would like to raise with the minister:

The youngish woman sent to a cafe in town for a job that only provided three days’ work a week. Not only did she receive less than when on benefits, the café refused to pay her until the end of the second week, meaning she had no money for 14 days.

● The 64-year-old disabled man who was being forced to apply for jobs, whether or not he was physically fit enough to take them up and, despite him qualifying for his old-age pension in less than 12 months, with the threat of benefit cuts if he refused.

● The woman who was almost in tears worrying, because she is frightened of computers and is not on the internet at home.

● The middle-aged man who was told that a job he must apply for involved van driving and he would need to provide transport. When he explained he only had a car, he was told to sell his car and buy a van if he wanted to avoid his benefits being cut.

We are also concerned about the introduction of the ‘claimant commitment’, which will be rolled out to all job centres this April. It is an integral part of universal credit - a record of a claimant’s individual responsibilities in relation to an award of universal credit. Anyone signing on will have to sign up to the claimant commitment before they get any money. Not everyone will understand what they are signing up to, and it will be used to cut benefits if any ‘commitment’ is broken, however unwittingly. Failure to agree to a commitment will result in no benefit being paid. In the case of couples, both partners will have to accept an individual commitment. We must remember in all this that anyone can be made redundant at any time and have to go through all this.

We are also concerned that, to get universal credit, claimants will have to meet a number of work-related requirements. One of these is the work preparation requirement, which can include a work placement comprising four weeks’ unpaid work. The government also intends to introduce compulsory community work for up to 26 weeks.

So here we finally have it - being made to work for your benefits, with no guarantee of a job at the end of it. However, with low wages and part-time jobs, work is often not the solution. Over half those in poverty in this country today are actually in work, not on benefits. Yet the thinking behind universal credit is to force people off benefits and into these low-paid jobs and increased poverty. This really is inexcusable.

Pete McLaren
 Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Failures

Peter of Black House Publishing suggests the CPGB adopt other ideas of Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists (Letters, January 23). If Peter can accept the demise of both the CPGB and the BUF, wouldn’t it be much wiser for the working class to dispense with 20th century failures altogether?

The Socialist Party of Great Britain are a class struggle party of world socialism, not artifices such as Ireland or Europe. The SPGB are not a ‘new party’, but one with new ideas yet to be tried and tested. Peter would still be in error about “the real enemy (international finance)” and class divisions being between productive versus unproductive members of society (which occupational franchise may disenfranchise), and I’m afraid that is not just semantics.

Jon D White
 SPGB

Do the maths

The Scottish Republican Socialist Movement welcomes the surge in support for a ‘yes’ vote reflected in the latest ICM poll for *Scotland on Sunday* (January 26).

The poll of a 1,000 over-16s was conducted by ICM between Tuesday and Friday last week. It shows that support for independence has grown from 32% to 37% since September. Support for the UK status quo has fallen from 49% to 44%. Furthermore, when pressed many of the ‘don’t knows’ indicated that they were more inclined - if they did vote - to vote ‘yes’.

The chief executive of the Yes Scotland campaign, Blair Jenkins, has said it is an “excellent place to be at this stage in the campaign”. A further 3% swing will see the ‘yes’ campaign take the lead. The SRSM pays tribute to the ‘yes’ campaign and calls on all independence campaigners to build on this momentum.

Alan Stewart
 International officer, SRSM

Don’t scoff

The Free North Campaign has been formed to build support for an independent republic in the north of England. While some may scoff at the idea, the fact remains that the north-south divide is a socioeconomic reality in Britain today. While few areas of Britain are exempt from the neoliberal onslaught of the political class, the north has borne the brunt of it.

At the last general election the Tories achieved a third of the vote in the north, indicating there is a solid anti-Tory majority. As with most independence movements, the foundation of our campaign is a progressive leftwing policy agenda that is opposed to all forms of bigotry and sectarianism. In the north values like solidarity, community spirit and mutual aid tend to be stronger than in the south. There’s also what could be called a northern identity, which you wouldn’t find in the south.

There is potential for a socialist revival in the north, and northern independence could be the driving force behind it. More information about the campaign can be found at freenorthcampaign.wordpress.com.

Mick Taylor
 Free North Campaign

Satanic

To me, communists are nuts, plain and simple. I like the answer the late French prime minister gave, when asked why he allowed the Communist Party to exist in France. François Mitterand answered: “It was a safety valve, where intellectuals could blow off steam.” Brilliant answer. I am still amused by this.

Communist countries don’t allow dissenting views. Ask those killed by the Satanic and evil North Koreans.

Phillip Stanley Bougard
 email

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 2, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 25, section 5: ‘Illustrations of the general law of capitalist accumulation’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the science of mythology
Tuesday February 4, 6.15pm: ‘Conceptions of life and death in lowland South America’. Speaker: Istvan Praet. 88 Fleet Street, London EC4 (next to St Bride’s church, 5 minutes walk from Blackfriars tube). Admission free, but donations appreciated. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Saturday February 1, 11am to 4pm: Local elections 2014 conference, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1. Building for 625 Tusc candidates on May 22. Pooled fare, capped at £10. Organised by Tusc: www.tusc.org.uk.

No privatisation of student debt

Monday February 3 to Friday February 7: National week of action. Coordinated by Student Assembly against Austerity: www.thestudentassembly.org.uk.

Hands off our student loans

Monday February 3, 7pm: Demonstration, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1. Part of week of action coordinated by the Student Assembly Against Austerity: www.thestudentassembly.org.

Justice for Leon

Tuesday February 4, 6pm: Candlelight vigil for Leon Briggs, who died in police custody. Town Hall, George Street, Luton. Organised by Justice for Leon Briggs: www.facebook.com/justice4leonbriggs.

Hexham People’s Assembly

Wednesday February 5, 7.30pm: Inaugural meeting, Hexham Community Centre, Gilesgate, Hexham NE46. Organised by People’s Assembly: <http://thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/event/hexham-paaa-launch-public-meeting>.

Stop G4S

Saturday February 8, 11am to 5pm: Campaign meeting, Quaker Meeting House, 10 Saint James Street, Sheffield S1. Organised by Stop G4S: stop-g4s@riseup.net.

Socialist films

Sunday February 9, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Pablo Larrain’s *No* (Chile/France/USA, 118 minutes). Followed by discussion. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Stop police killings

Tuesday February 11, 6pm: Protest, Lambeth town hall, Brixton Hill, London SW2. Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: www.defendtherighttoprotest.org.

Hands off our unions

Tuesday February 11, 6.30 pm: Rally, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. Organised by People’s Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Solidarity with fast food workers

Saturday February 15: Day of action, nationwide events. See www.fastfoodrights.wordpress.com for details. Organised by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union: www.bfawu.org.

Unite welfare campaigns

Saturday February 15, 10am: All-UK conference of welfare campaign groups, central London venue (TBC). Organised by Boycott Workfare: www.boycottworkfare.org.

No to Atos

Wednesday February 19, 8am to 5pm: Protest at an Atos centre near you . See websites for details of local actions: www.facebook.com/ATOSNationalDemo. Organised by Disabled People Against the Cuts: www.dpac.uk.net.

Women’s Assembly

Saturday February 22, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by the People’s Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Miners’ Great Strike

Thursday February 27 to Sunday March 2: Photo display and miners’ banners commemorating the coal strike of 1984-85, Tyneside Irish Club, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Organised by North East National Union of Mineworkers: 0191 384 3515.

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.

RACISM

Dieudonné's calculated anti-Semitism

Free speech is too valuable a weapon to be thrown away. Eddie Ford calls for unequivocal opposition to state bans on racists and fascists

Last December in an "entertaining" 3:3 draw between West Bromwich Albion and West Ham United something new was brought to the game of football and our national culture - unfortunately. Whilst celebrating the scoring of his first ever goal for West Brom, the French player, Nicolas Anelka, performed the *quenelle* - a hand gesture that involves pointing one arm diagonally downwards, palm in front, while touching the shoulder with the opposite hand. *Quenelle* is actually a French dish consisting of elongated fish or meat balls, which are said to look like a suppository.¹ Thus, according to Wikipedia, the phrase *mettre une quenelle* ("to give someone the quenelle") is a gesture simulating the sexual practice of fisting - the "arm outstretched refers to the length of the arm going up one's bottom".² In other words, 'Up yours!'

The *quenelle* was invented and popularised by Anelka's friend, Dieudonné M'bala M'bala - the half-Breton, half-Cameroon, French comedian, who many years ago in a different life was described as a "Gallic Lenny Henry". Dieudonné himself is a friend and supporter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, former leader of the far-right Front National, and his stage acts are notorious for their dubious content often relating to Jews. While Dieudonné claims the *quenelle* is an anti-establishment gesture, the context in which he uses it and its adoption by 'anti-Zionists' gives it a rather different meaning - that of anti-Semitism. It has been described as an inverted Nazi salute.

Anelka initially said on his Twitter page that the gesture on that day was "just a special dedication" to Dieudonné - nothing more. However, the French minister for sports and youth affairs, Valérie Fourneyron, had a different perspective. She immediately condemned Anelka's "disgusting" and "shocking provocation", declaring there to be "no place for anti-Semitism on the football field".

Naturally, the 34-year-old Anelka claims innocence: "I am neither racist nor anti-Semitic", he tweeted to his 900,000 followers. Rather, he claimed, the "meaning of *quenelle* is anti-system" and said he did not know "what religion has to do with this story". The message being that he is just a humble football player (albeit one on £52,000 a week) up against the establishment, whether it be the French political class or the English Football Association. A man of the people.

Bluntly, Anelka is bullshitting. It is stretching credibility to breaking point to think Anelka is that stupid or naive about the meaning of the *quenelle*. No, spontaneous gesture though it might have been, Anelka knew what he was doing on that football pitch.

Anyway, the FA has charged Anelka with an "aggravated offence" and the footballer now faces a disciplinary hearing. If it finds against him, he faces a minimum five-match ban and probably longer. Zoopla, a house property website co-owned by the prominent Jewish businessman, Alex Chesterman, has already decided to end its sponsorship of WBA and will instead "focus on other marketing activities". Anti-Semitism is obviously not good for business.

However, the protracted nature of the FA investigations has already prompted criticism from several quarters - especially the liberal football anti-racist group, Kick It Out, which has expressed its "frustration" at the lack of prompt action. Lord Ouseley, KIO's chairman, has accused some

clubs of "hiding behind the FA" and ducking their responsibilities when it comes to tackling racism, whether by players or fans.

Meanwhile, the West Brom striker insists that he is "anti-establishment", not anti-Semitic - just like his good friend, Dieudonné.

Calculated strategy?

Fourneyron is quite right about the *quenelle* salute - it is an anti-Semitic provocation, for all the righteous protestations of Anelka and Dieudonné. Yes, the latter started off on the radical left - using his shows to attack racism - ironically the Front National and the odious Le Pen. The French comedian even stood in the 1997 French legislative election for The Utopians party (which brought together artists from the Dreux region) against the FN candidate, Marie-France Stirbois - receiving an eminently respectable 8% of the vote. In his shows and on demonstrations, Dieudonné was a militant campaigner for the rights of migrants without residence permits (the *sans papiers*) and the Palestinian cause.

Now, Dieudonné constantly portrays the Jews (sorry, "Zionists") as the *main source* of France's misery and economic decline - not capitalism. In a clear demonstration of Dieudonné's political trajectory, Le Pen - the former object of his comic ire - became in July 2008 the godfather to his third child. Not insignificantly, a 'traditionalist' Catholic priest, Philippe Laguérie, officiated at the baptism. An ominous resurfacing of the *old* rightwing France - Catholic, counterrevolutionary and anti-Semitic.

Various explanations have been offered for Dieudonné's conversion. Some have suggested that his primary motivation is money, seeing how his performances are now always sold out - audiences attracted by his controversial reputation. 'Twas ever thus. Others though believe that he harbours serious political ambitions. For instance, Anne-Sophie Mercier, a French TV journalist - who in 2005 wrote a book entitled *The truth about Dieudonné* - believes that his lurch into anti-Semitism and reactionary populism is part of a "calculated strategy". The comedian, she argues, wants to become a political leader of the 'anti-establishment' disaffected, but mainly of young blacks and Muslims. It is far easier, Mercier argues, to persuade this constituency to blame Jews than to turn it against a white bourgeois society whose material symbols of success it actively craves.

Whatever the exact nature of his motivations, Dieudonné first used the *quenelle* in a 2005 show about secularism named '1905' - arguably, the gesture had already taken on an anti-Semitic dimension. Tellingly, in 2007 he was found guilty of "incitement to racial hatred" on several occasions, one typically offending statement being: "All of them [Jews] are slave-traders who've moved into banking, show-business and, today, terrorist action." By 2009 the *quenelle* had become linked more clearly to anti-Semitism, when it appeared on a campaign poster³ for the 'anti-Zionist list' for that year's European elections - Dieudonné then being a star candidate for the Anti-Zionist Party (PAS).⁴ In that

campaign he stated that his intention was to "put a *quenelle* into Zionism's butt". Similarly, he has subsequently talked about sliding his *quenelle* into the "arsehole" of president François Hollande.

It should be noted that PAS - an eclectic, hotch-potch of an organisation - was partly funded by the former Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The latter also financed Dieudonné's 2012 feature film, *L'Anti-sémite*, the story of a violent alcoholic who likes dressing up as a Nazi officer and goes to a Jewish psychiatrist to cure him of his anti-Semitism - when he is not mocking Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide.⁵ The film also features the despicable Robert Faurisson, who was fined by a French court in 1983 for having declared that Hitler "never ordered nor permitted that anyone be killed by reason of his race or religion" and was convicted in 1990 of Holocaust denial. He obviously impressed Ahmadinejad, who in 2012 granted Faurisson an award for his "courage" in telling the truth.

In fact, the adage, 'By their friends shall ye know them', could have been invented for Dieudonné. Another close friend and co-thinker is Alain Soral, who also appeared in *L'Anti-sémite* and the 2009 'anti-Zionist list'. Soral flipped from being a Parti Communiste Français member to an FN central committee member, whilst always maintaining that he adhered to a "sociological Marxist analysis of the modern-day society" (he left the FN in 2009). Soral these days is distinguished by a noxious

flow of anti-Semitism, such as his 2004 comments on the *Complément d'enquête* TV programme that "for 2,500 years, every time they [Jews] settled somewhere, after about 50 years or so they get kicked out". He went on: "You'd think that's strange. It's as though everyone is wrong except them". But if "you're talking with a Frenchman who is a Zionist Jew", Soral said, then "the guy will start shouting, yelling, going mad ... you won't be able to carry on with the conversation". Which for Soral "tells you that there's a psychopathology with Zionism-Judaism, something that verges on mental illness".

Dieudonné can bleat all he wants about being "anti-Zionist", not anti-Semitic, but the evidence is overwhelming. One of his most well-known sketches involves him giving a heroism award to Robert Faurisson. The 'joke' was that the award was being presented by a man in a concentration camp uniform, complete with a yellow star. You had to be there. Dieudonné told the Iranian Press TV station that the "Zionist lobby" has "taken France as hostage", knowing how to "structure themselves into a mafia-like organisation". Clearly this is not the anti-Zionism of someone, for example, opposed to the brutal oppression of the Palestinians by the state of Israel; more like the 'anti-Zionism' of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, predicated on a conspiracy theory that "the Jews" are secretly pulling all the strings. Dieudonné's *quenelle* is the 'anti-establishment' gesture of reactionary fools.

Encouraging

How to respond to the *quenelle*? The approach of official France is to resort to proscriptions under 'hate crime' laws in

an attempt to close down Dieudonné's one-man act. His scheduled shows in Nantes, Tours and Orléans have been banned and he has already been fined a total €65,000 (£54,000) stemming from nine convictions for "hate speech". Manuel Valls, the interior minister, has vowed to "pursue" the comedian through the courts and is considering legal constraints on Dieudonné's online appearances, which so far have been viewed by over two million people.

From our own, communist point of view, we are unequivocally opposed to state bans on racists and fascists or any other organisation. Yes, we can organise all sorts of protests against the likes of Dieudonné - concerted heckling, no platforming, physical intimidation, and so on. This is a purely tactical question depending upon the concrete circumstances. But not state laws attacking freedom of expression and association - free speech is too valuable to throw away. Anyhow, almost anyone can play the state's game - whether it be Dieudonné and his 'anti-establishment' salute or Shostakovich coding anti-Stalin messages into his music. No, communists never lend their support to 'anti-extremist' legislation or laws prohibiting certain words, phrases or symbols, as ultimately they will be weapons used against us - something that history has shown time and time again.

Hence we are slightly encouraged by the January 14 issue of *Socialist Worker*. True, it did not come out with the right line, but neither did it come out with the *wrong* line - which normally consists of something like: 'We do not entirely approve, but we understand why you want to ban an English Defence League or British National Party march, so we in the SWP will not oppose you.' However, in this article we read that the government's attempts to ban him "don't come from any genuine will to fight racism", reminding us that Valls himself has "actively fuelled racism against Roma people and Muslims" - and that such "double standards" have "ensured considerable controversy over the banning of Dieudonné's shows".

We are also told that Valls's "offensive" against Dieudonné comes just as "long-awaited statistics showed unemployment continued to rise, contrary to the government's promises", and that the interior minister was filmed "being admonished" by a working class resident in Aulnay - "The real problem of French people is more serious than a so-called *quenelle* problem, or visiting a supposedly unsafe neighbourhood. What we elected you for is mainly employment. That's the real problem."

OK, it is not a brilliant analysis - this is the SWP we are talking about, after all. Thus we get the usual economism, as opposed to a stress on high politics and the fight for extreme democracy. But, then again, the *Socialist Worker* article contains a distinct element of truth. At least the SWP is *not* giving tacit approval to state bans in this article ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

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Dieudonné M'bala M'bala: political ambitions

Bondage and bigotry

The International Socialist Network has split - over a work of art. Paul Demarty is bemused

A hundred years ago, the outbreak of the Great War caused a split in the social democratic movement - while initially most of the Second International's sections supported their own states, with only two outliers (most famously the Bolsheviks) taking an anti-war line, by the end of the war the movement was cleaved in two. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the whole bloody history of the short 20th century stems from the response of the workers' movement to what was plainly an existential choice of indisputable importance.

To mark the anniversary, the International Socialist Network has itself split ... over a photograph. It shows Dasha Zhukova, the fashion designer, art collector and young girlfriend of Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, sitting on a chair that is also a sculpture of a prone black woman. A football blog, of all things, described the picture like this: "The black woman depicted as an inanimate object used to service the white, dominant female is unarguably demeaning, disgraceful and reminiscent of the degradation black women have endured over decades."¹

The ISN ended up embroiled in a bitter slanging match - not so much over the above assessment itself as whether that was all there was to it. A certain professor of European studies at Kings College London will, no doubt, be satistically pleased to see his former *bêtes noires* fall out on a Facebook thread, started by Magpie Corvid, then an ISN steering committee member - and also a professional dominatrix.

"I wish there were hot BDSM pics in the *daily fail* every day," she wrote, "and that vile racist incidents were not their occasion. I looooooooooove using people as furniture!"² The venom that followed was tiresomely predictable, but - it is also worth noting - a highly disturbing glimpse into the perverse authoritarianism of modern 'intersectional' identity politics. Most of the ISN piled in to argue, in effect, that comrade Magpie's sexual predilections were an expression of her white privilege. Richard Seymour, defending Magpie's position, caught a barrage of abuse himself.

As always in such cases, the Zhukova picture affair is only half of the split issue. It looks like the final straw for Seymour, Magpie and their section of the ISN, which we have characterised as its right wing. The comrades have already complained about "anathematisation" in ISN debates. By the time the ISN's steering committee circulated a statement³ condemning Seymour and Magpie, Charlotte Bence - one of the original 'Facebook Four' - had already decamped to Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21), the most recent split from the Socialist Workers Party.

A resignation letter,⁴ signed by Seymour, Magpie and allies such as China Miéville, appeared on January 27, almost simultaneously with the ISN's discussion bulletin⁵ ... in which the same comrades, including comrade Bence, announce the formation of a platform and argue that the ISN should dissolve itself into RS21. Perhaps Seymour and co will be paid-up RS21 members by the time you read this.

Death spiral

That they should be so keen to jump ship is hardly remarkable. The Seymourites have been a minority in the organisation, and increasingly the subject of vituperation from factional opponents (some of which, no doubt, is deserved). The latest Facebook farce is merely a particularly shabby



Dasha Zhukova sitting on the offending art work

example of the genre.

So there are two stories here. First of all, barely nine months after its foundation, the ISN appears for all the world to be in an irreversible death-spiral. Its comrades imagined the ISN's heterodox, heterogeneous political make-up to be an advantage, given that their purpose was to rethink the politics that had animated their SWP lives. It is not an unreasonable assumption, but it was nevertheless false.

The Seymourites' main interest was playing at big politics: grand realignments, mass organisations and such. Their model was Syriza. The ISN left looks, rather, to the SWP's rank-and-file heritage, and broadly argues for recomposition from the 'bottom up'. The latter often resented 'regroupment' talks with other organisations such as Socialist Resistance, since such affairs are invariably discussions among leaders, and thus top-down in nature.

RS21 is an attractive proposition more or less due to its being at the beginning of what is likely to be a similarly truncated life-cycle. Its debates are still, as the ISN's were for a time, 'comradely'. While wounds of the SWP factional struggle still fester (many in the ISN still resent the hopelessly softness displayed by those now in RS21 in the run-up to the SWP's March 'special conference' on the Delta scandal), now that all concerned are outside the mother ship, the practical differences seem to be smaller. Many of the RS21 comrades, in any case, were 'radicalised' during 2013, and arrived in December at more or less the same level of anger and disillusionment that Seymour had exhibited last January.

Indeed, the CPGB wrote to RS21 suggesting talks, to which the answer was, unsurprisingly, 'no'. The reason? "As you are aware, we are in the very early stages of beginning to work together outside the SWP. We have a temporary structure aimed at facilitating collective work and beginning a process of political discussion. As such we have no mandate or basis to engage in talks with any group at this time." In other words, exactly the self-description of

the ISN circa spring 2013; we shall see when the centrifugal forces take hold. We cannot imagine the result will be any more dignified.

Art and fetishism

Indeed, the other story here suggests that it will be less so. It may only be the final straw for the Seymourites, rather than the substantive reason for their split, but we cannot blind ourselves to the appalling standard of argument directed against Seymour and Magpie over the Zhukova photograph. Zhukova sits on a work of art by Bjarne Melgaard - Melgaard's sculpture is obviously an homage to Allen Jones's *Chair*, part of a 1969 triptych by the British pop-artist of women repurposed as items of furniture.

The main thrust of Jones's sculptures is a playful reference to the fetish and BDSM scene, which fascinated him; the pieces are bound up, so to speak, with the contemporaneous 'sexual revolution', and the combination of obvious kitsch and sexual directness is perfectly representative of the art of the time. The use of humans as furniture, by the by, is - as Magpie's unfortunate status update implies - a documented sexual fetish, known as *forniphilia*.

Exactly what Melgaard is up to here is another matter. Changing only the race of the 'chair' is obviously a provocation. *The Guardian's* Jonathan Jones suggests that "in making this woman black he means to retoxify the art of Allen Jones, to offend people with an image long since accepted. The intention is therefore the opposite of racist: it is to question power and representation. Are you offended by this black woman's abuse? Then why is it OK for white women to be similarly humiliated in a respected pop art icon in the Tate collection?"⁶

On the other hand, we might play up the fetish angle further here. In the era of *Fifty shades of grey*, it can hardly be suggested that kinky sex as such is as shocking to the public mind as it was half a century ago. 'Race play', however - blacking up, or indeed whitening up, for sexual purposes - is still incendiary, the echoes of blackface and minstrel shows all too immediate. Melgaard is a provocateur: he is not interesting in toxifying Jones's art, but

his own.

The point of all this is that *any* interpretation of Melgaard's sculpture hinges on the question of sexual fetishism. The same, in fact, is true of the photo of Zhukova, whose meaning surely relies on her position in relation to a sexually dominated body.

It is hardly the case, moreover, that controversy over fetishistic art is new. Jones's *Chair* most recently went on public display in the Tate gallery as part of its 'Art under attack' exhibition, of works that had been vandalised, in honour of its having been the victim of a feminist paint stripper attack.

Perhaps more relevant in this connection is Robert Mapplethorpe, whose nude photographs of black men were and are hotly debated. The issue is put nicely in an essay on Mapplethorpe's earlier BDSM pictures: "The sheer diversity of the erotic props and paraphernalia on display in the s/m project asserts that Mapplethorpe is cataloguing a collective subculture, not merely his own desires or favoured practices as part of that subculture. But in Mapplethorpe's images of black male nudes ... the model's body is stripped of any marker of sexual identity or subjectivity - no traces here of the black man's own erotic investments or fetish objects."⁷

The blackness itself is the fetish, which is somehow more troubling than the enjoyment of inflicting and receiving pain. Mapplethorpe's black nudes - which are both technically impeccable and, yes, *hot* - trouble our complicated consciousness of race because they make explicit its link to the murky imperatives of human sexuality. Melgaard's sculpture crudely beats one over the head with this problem, and its relationship to racism is problematic (in the way that Ku Klux Klan propaganda is not).

Back to Mao

Short-circuiting that discussion in order to declare Melgaard's *Chair* "just racist" is reactionary philistinism, no different in substance to the moral panics of Mary Whitehouse. It may perfectly well be 'bad art' (it certainly is not original), but bad responses to

bad art are hardly a corrective.

Indeed, things are worse than that. If the sculpture (or photo) is racist *in itself*, then the concrete individuals who engage in race-play as part of consensual pleasure must also be beyond the pale, as they no less mobilise fetishised images of race; their fantasies become equivalent to minstrel shows. Moreover, the concomitant image of domination must necessarily map onto a desire to degrade and dominate *outside* the fantasy of the sexual fetish - which more or less rules out BDSM, practised and enjoyed by a significant fraction of the human population, altogether. As much as it is precisely such accusations that degrade debate on this issue, I cannot describe this attitude as other than ignorant, sexually conservative bigotry, worthy of a Ukip councillor, but not a socialist.

Yet what other consequence than ignorance can possibly follow from the privilege-baiting that now substitutes wholly for rational debate on the question of oppression? What greater understanding can possibly emerge from a mindset that only repeats, in ever louder terms, the first twitch of prejudice? Those who harangued Magpie and Seymour would only have been happy if they had immediately capitulated and repented. When a position is criticised as being an expression of 'white privilege', the hidden payload - ever more obviously - is 'Everyone who does not agree with me exactly is complicit in the oppression of black people'.

It should not surprise us, of course, as privilege theory is every inch a product of American Maoism, and all its basic discursive features - Manichean presentations of minor disputes, strident moralism and the idea that the privileged need to be 'educated' by the oppressed - are deflected products of the worship of the Cultural Revolution. That it has made its way into official 'radical liberalism' is to be expected - after all, so did most of the Maoists.

It has been suggested that, so far as Seymour is concerned, all this is a matter of chickens coming home to roost. Indeed, he vocally supported the ideological opening up of the ISN comrades to intersectionality and related conceptual alibis for the aforementioned irrationalism; to him (and to most others who left the SWP with him), engagement with these ideas would allow the ISN to be more broad and inclusive. The fatal flaw of this view is that the feminists (and the queer activists, and everyone else) are just as divided as the rest of us; and their theoretical commitments are incipiently irrationalist and (thanks to the Maoism) even more fissile than those of the traditional far left.

If he needs proof of this, he need only check his Facebook notifications ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

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PALESTINE

Collectivising the mice

The Arab working class is the agency that can win a Palestinian state, argues Tony Greenstein

Moshé Machover chose a particularly inappropriate analogy to begin his *Weekly Worker* article, entitled 'Belling the cat', in which he argued against a secular, unitary state in Palestine.¹ He described a fable, attributed to Aesop, whereby mice agreed that a bell should be hung around the neck of the cat that threatened them, so they might be warned of its approach; unfortunately, however, the means of carrying out this plan was not forthcoming.

In fact the struggle of early humanity could indeed be described as the 'belling of the cat' - it consisted in subduing wild animals, such as mammoths, on the basis of the superior brainpower of humans.

Moshé argues that without the achievement of socialism in Israel, then

the prospect of a capitalist democracy implied by the one-state project does not provide [the Israeli working class] with an incentive to overthrow the Zionist regime. On the contrary, it is much more likely to be mobilised by the regime to actively oppose this project and fight against it.

Comrade Machover even argues that:

... the Israeli working class as a whole has an objective interest in socialism. The Hebrew majority of the Israeli working class will therefore have not only the ability, but also an incentive to overthrow the capitalist Zionist regime, if that would mean becoming part of a dominant working class in a socialist context ... So we must conclude that the Israeli working class, which is an *internal* force, is capable of overthrowing the Zionist regime, but will not do so for the sake of the one-state project, because its Hebrew majority has no class interest in this bourgeois goal.

But, Moshé argues, "Contrariwise, the Palestinian Arab working class and its close allies, who do have much to gain from it, are for the most part (except for the minority inside Israel) an *external* force, and are unable to overthrow Zionism."

Is he seriously arguing that but for the unitary state solution - ie, deZionisation - then the Israeli Jewish working class would overthrow Zionism? Why then did it not overthrow Zionism when most Palestinians supported Oslo and the two-state solution?

What Moshé implies is that the root of the problem is a national conflict, between the Hebrew Jews and the Palestinians. I disagree. Like many settler working classes, including that in South Africa, the settler working class proved the most reactionary class in society. Their identification as a 'nation' came from their oppression of the indigenous population. No amount of appeals to the Australian working class by the Aboriginal people, or to the Canadian working class by the Chinese railway workers, had the slightest effect. Quite the contrary, it was these forces that were most hostile to the native peoples and black/Asian people. In Ireland it was the Protestant working class that drove the Catholics from the dock and shipyards. In Algeria the French colonists did likewise. Our purpose should be not to give in to these fears of the settlers.

What agency?

Moshé attributed the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa primarily to



Displaced Palestinians: do they hold the key?

the indigenous struggle. But this is not true. Quite the contrary. The demise of Portuguese colonialism, epitomised in Angola and Mozambique and symbolised by the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1987-88, an important episode against the South African army's intervention in the Angolan civil war (1975-2002),² played a significant role. Coupled, of course, with the indigenous black struggle (where the working class possessed an economic power, which the Palestinians do not) and also a growing boycott campaign.

Moshé has failed to answer his own question about the possibility of a single-state solution. I will remind him:

I propose to subject this vision to the test of *agency*: what socio-political force can be counted on to implement such a vision, and in what circumstances would this be likely to come about? I address this issue from a socialist viewpoint ...

It seems clear, in the wake of the Arab spring, that only the masses of the Arab east and in particular the Egyptian and Iraqi working class have that ability. The west's support for Israel lies in Israel's crucial role in safeguarding western interests in the region. As Al Haig, US secretary of state, said, "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security."³

Therein lies the solution. Demographically and militarily the Palestinians are too weak on their own to conquer Zionism, but a threat to Israel's role as the US's guard dog, coupled with the overthrow of regimes in the Arab Gulf, which are mainly dependent on migrant labour, is a different matter altogether. A threat to the Saudi regime would in particular unleash a storm in which Zionism was on the agenda.

Moshé accepts that "The working class is the only force in society that can escape the limits of national

liberation, because it also challenges the rule of imperialism's internal allies - the powerful local elites in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia". Well, this is not necessarily true, especially given the economically distorted nature of the Arab Gulf, which relies on unorganised Arab labour and is able to buy off the opposition; but, as a general rule, the interests of the Palestinians lie in the overthrow of the Arab regimes and the triumph in particular of the Egyptian and Iraqi working class, to say nothing of those in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The international working class has not achieved power in even one country (with the partial exception of the USSR). Why should the Palestinians be the first to make a socialist revolution, given the class structure of a refugee population?

Moshé accepts that, unlike the two-state project,

the one-state project is *revolutionary*. The former is perfectly consistent with the continued existence of Israel as a Zionist state. Indeed, the ... PLO would replace direct Israeli military occupation by political and economic domination of a Zionist Israel over a defenceless and subservient Palestinian statelet. No revolution would be needed. But the one-state project self-evidently requires the deZionisation of Israel: overthrow of its Zionist regime, and complete termination of the Zionist project. Indeed, the Israeli state itself would have to be superseded by a very different polity.

Comrade Machover accepts that the unitary, democratic state of Palestine is inherently revolutionary, unlike the two-state solution, but then defers to the Israeli working class. If Zionism is ever overthrown it will in part be because of the withdrawal of support by the USA and the acquiescence of the Israeli oligarchy, middle class and liberal section of society. Most of the Mizrahim and Russian working class will be

the last to come on board and will constitute the 'bitter-enders'.

Zionist identity

But I agree with Moshé's argument against Omar Barghouti - that Israeli Jews will only ever be a small minority of those who join the struggle: "... the one-state project self-evidently requires the deZionisation of Israel: overthrow of its Zionist regime, and complete termination of the Zionist project." He accepts that it is the only one that is compatible with a socialist solution:

Indeed, the Israeli state itself would have to be superseded by a very different polity. So the one-state project can only be implemented by social forces that must not only be persuaded that this is in their interest, but must also be able to overthrow Zionism and the Israeli state structure.

But the Israeli working class has not even been active in its own defence. Why should the overthrow of Zionism, which, after all, is its identity, be of any interest to it? On the contrary, like all settler working classes, the Hebrews will be the last to accept the inevitable. When Zionism is being replaced it will be the Israeli oligarchy, its middle class, its secular liberals and a small section of Mizrahis who will abandon Zionism.

I am not arguing for a one-state solution as "a stepping stone" to the fulfilment of a unitary state: quite the contrary. Partition has always been a reactionary solution. Still less that such a state would be socialist, *but* there is a somewhat greater chance of the forces of revolution being set in motion under a unitary state than the proposed mini-Bantustan that is (at best) envisaged.

The purpose of a unitary, democratic, secular state is a conceptual one. When people ask you what you stand for, then you have to have an answer. Furthermore it enables the struggle for human rights for Palestinians *as individuals* to be the main modus of struggle.

That is why the struggle against Zionism and apartheid are indeed similar. The Afrikaners were not

a nation, nor were the French of Algeria or the British in Ireland and the Malvinas. It is indeed true that, as in South Africa, it is only a minority of Israeli Jews who have become anti-Zionist. It is surely a good thing that the proponents of a secular, unitary state welcome them, just as black South Africans welcomed white opponents of apartheid.

Moshé states that "the Hebrew masses - predominantly the majority Hebrew section of the working class, including white-collar workers who were at the forefront of the massive protests in 2011 against neoliberalism - have nothing to gain from the one-state project". He is aware of the fact that attempts were indeed made to link the demands of the Israeli Jewish protestors with the occupation. He is also aware that the settlers had their presence there to pre-empt this and Shelly Yachimovich, the Israeli Labour leader, consciously opposed any such linkage, along with those Israelis who were complaining about the cost of living. They were even unable to link the vast expenditure on the settlements to their own situation.

Moshé cites Tikva Honig-Parnass as saying: "The contention that the [Israeli-Palestinian] 'conflict' cannot have a bourgeois nationalist resolution is based on an argument about the differences in the colonial models of Israel and South Africa."

Machover emphasises that this difference is central to his analysis of the conflict and his conclusion regarding its resolution. I aim to show that this assumed connection between the colonial model and the resolution is faulty.

But it is a fact that decolonisation and national liberation movements were largely successful, even if the results were not socialist, as with the corrupt African National Congress in South Africa. That, however, is the task of the oppressed peoples. The western working classes have also not been very successful in achieving a socialist change in society.

What the struggle against Zionism raises - and this is why the analogy with apartheid is important - is the demand for equal rights for all Palestinians, be they Arab or Jewish, wherever they live. That should be the prime demand of the Palestinians and why all 'peace talks' and the bubble of Ramallah are dangerous to them.

Moshé's thesis is that the main fear of the Israeli Jewish working class is that in a unitary state they could suffer from what they inflicted. Settler populations always do have such fears. The fear that they will experience what the Palestinians experienced. Our job is not to give way to such fears, but to say that all national rights - *except* the right to Jewish supremacy - will be theirs for the taking. Israel will truly become a state of its own citizens. The Israeli Jews define their 'nationality' by their role primarily, even though they do not claim nationhood.

Moshé imagines a pure social revolution. However, Lenin noted: "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is"⁴.

Notes

1. 'Belling the cat' *Weekly Worker* December 12 2013.
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cuito_Cuanavale.
3. <http://www.iwse.com/ygQle>.
4. VI Lenin, 'The discussion on self-determination summed up': www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm.

SOLIDARITY

Grappling with the new situation

How to meet the challenge presented by the US-Iran deal? Peter Manson reports on Hopi's day school

Around 40 people attended the school organised by Hands Off the People of Iran on January 25. As Hopi secretary Mark Fischer explained in introducing the day, the election of a new Iranian president and the subsequent negotiations on Tehran's nuclear capability had "changed the context of our work".

But it had not changed the underlying principles. Hopi, he said, has "laid down a marker" for anti-imperialist, anti-war work, in that it makes clear that the allies of the solidarity movement must be the Iranian working class and democratic movement, not the oppressive regime. We must now "take stock" of the new situation after the election of Hassan Rowhani.

The day featured sessions on an overview of the Middle East, looking at the role of imperialism and Israel; on the position of Iran's working class; and on the country's national minorities. The school ended with a brief discussion of Hopi's priorities on how to build solidarity. In every session there was plenty of time for debate and engagement with the platform speakers.

Starting the ball rolling was Mike Macnair of the CPGB, who opened the session on the Middle East. He was sharing a platform with Israeli communist Moshé Machover, who dealt with Zionism's particular interest in provoking conflict with Iran. I will not report in detail on what comrade Macnair said, since his whole contribution can be read elsewhere in this issue,¹ but his wide-ranging speech dealt not only with Iran, but Syria and Egypt too. He warned that sections of the US establishment see the current negotiations with Iran as part of a strategy to launch a full-scale attack - although he stressed that an invasion was ruled out. Comrade Macnair also commented briefly on the political-economic background - the decline of capitalism and in particular of the US hegemon.

Israel and Iran

Comrade Machover began his contribution by saying that it followed on from what Mike Macnair had just said about the unlikelihood of an invasion. Invasions, he said, "no longer work". Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya - all had gone very badly. Which is why he agreed with comrade Macnair that there would be no imperialist troops sent into Iran.

Comrade Machover made the point that it is a truism to say the ruling class pursues its own interests. But it is also an oversimplification: it pursues what it *thinks* are its interests. And imperialism is not monolithic, containing within it sharply conflicting interests. For example, war in the Middle East might be good for the oil companies and arms suppliers, but it would be very bad for other sections. Having mentioned oil, he agreed with comrade Macnair that any war would not be about *access* to oil, although it would partly be about *control* of it.

Comrade Machover reminded the school that, while Tehran has agreed to roll back its nuclear programme, that does not mean that Iran was now reduced to being a client state - far from it. Which is why Israel still has an interest in provoking a conflict. Iran's influence in the Middle East diminishes Israel's hegemony in the region.

However, there is a second reason why a war with Iran would be useful from Israel's point of view. As comrade Machover has explained on



Oil workers: strategic

several occasions, including in the *Weekly Worker*,² it would provide it with an opportunity to "ethnically cleanse" the West Bank under cover of the crisis and chaos produced by war, as outlined in the 'Sharon plan' of 2002. In that sense the US war on Iraq was "finished too soon" for Israel. From the US point of view, an attack on Iran would not only "deal with" that country: it would "take the lid off" the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Comrade Machover noted that in Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians, prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu is not just demanding recognition of Israel: he is demanding recognition of its status as the "nation-state of the entire Jewish people". In other words, endorsement of Israel's racist immigration policy. However, as with Iran, we are very far from "complete capitulation". So the situation could end in a new conflagration, involving Israel and both Iran and Palestine.

During the debate, one comrade disagreed with the platform speakers on Iraq: the invasion had accomplished what the US wanted to achieve, she said. To which comrade Macnair replied that, yes, Saddam had been overthrown, but that had been followed by utter devastation; comrade Machover added that as a result the US had "lost control".

There was also discussion about US motives for a possible attack. One comrade from the Iranian left group, Rahe Kargar, commented that it would be the "last mistake of a declining hegemon". John Bridge from the CPGB pointed out that the US no longer has a "grand strategy". For example, having sought a rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood following the 'Arab spring', the US now seems to be operating in a strategic void.

Charlie Pottins from the Jewish Socialists Group believed that Netanyahu's "state of all the Jews" would require the help of anti-Semitic elements in the west - comrade Machover pointed out that Israel's immigration policy was actually a "limiting factor", meaning that the Zionist state could never pull in the necessary numbers: in fact the sources of potential immigration were "now exhausted" - one reason why Zionism

can never achieve complete victory.

Working class

Opening the session on the struggles of workers in Iran, Hopi chair Yassamine Mather first of all looked at the effect of sanctions on the working class. They had adversely affected the everyday life of the mass of the people, producing mass unemployment and dire poverty. Recent figures show that Iran is registering -8% growth, combined with 40%-plus inflation.

Of course, it is untrue to say, as regime propagandists claim, that *all* Iran's ills result from sanctions. The economic hardship and the repressive apparatus can hardly be laid in their entirety at the door of the imperialists. Few buy into those claims and comrade Mather was sure that "people will rebel". Nevertheless, it is clear that sanctions were aimed at the mass of ordinary people and it is they who have indeed suffered as a result.

Comrade Mather pointed out that seven out of the eight candidates standing in last year's presidential elections favoured making a deal with the US. The supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, had effectively accepted it as a necessary evil. So there can be no doubt that sanctions in the end forced change - not *regime* change, but a government ready to concede on nuclear development. So now Iran has agreed to limit its uranium enrichment programme and destroy certain stockpiles - otherwise it will face the reimposition of the small proportion of sanctions that have been relaxed.

However, in parallel with the softening in relation to nuclear capability there has been a toughening of the regime's economic policy and its attitude to the working class. While previous president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was hardly the workers' friend, Rowhani had stepped up the regime's neoliberal policies: the aim is to eliminate "residual socialist practices". There is a drive to attract foreign investment on the basis of Iran's cheap labour. Repression in some ways is being stepped up too.

Comrade Mather concluded her speech on an optimistic note: the regime "still fears the working class" and she was sure those fears were justified.

Next to speak was Torab Saleth,

who was a socialist activist during the Iranian revolution of 1979. At that time there were limited numbers of workers, although the working class population was constantly being expanded, thanks to migration from rural areas - there were half a million people living in shanty towns in Tehran alone, he said. But by the late 70s working class confidence was rising, as was the number of strikes - the general strike at the end of 1978 was a key factor in the crumbling of the shah's regime, which finally fell in January 1979.

Comrade Saleth talked about the creation of neighbourhood committees, which linked up with the strike committees to form a formidable component of the revolution. But, despite this, the working class suffered from a "lack of leadership" resulting from the weakness of the organised left. It was little wonder that the committees often used mosques as their local bases from which to organise. However, at this time, he emphasised, the working class was "not dominated by Islamic ideology".

During the course of the insurrection the strike committees, or *shora*, took up arms. The workers took over the factories, as the owners fled. They began to take over the distribution of essential supplies - much to the consternation of the bazaaris. However, noted comrade Saleth, these *shora* did not really link up beyond the individual workplace or district, which led him to conclude that the situation was "nowhere near dual power".

It was the Islamists who realised the potential - students "following the imam's line" took up the idea of uniting the *shora*, and the working class did not challenge the new regime. Islamic "storm troops" were recruited from among the urban poor and within a year all the councils were in Islamic hands. The working class was facing not just defeat, but a long period of retreat.

Comrade Saleth went on to talk about the debate on the left on the way forward. Should we attempt to reignite the factory committees? Should we just become trade union activists? His view had been that clandestine workers' committees and a clandestine national union should be set up, "along the lines of the Polish Solidarity".

Turning to the current period, he said that lately there has been a "huge upsurge" in working class struggles, but there is little to show from them organisationally, either in the shape of mass unions or a workers' party. Nevertheless, in the new period following the easing of relations with the west, there were possibilities for the workers' movement. Like comrade Mather he was "optimistic" - he was enthusiastic about "new elements" in the class, and about the state "being less able to repress".

There were questions from the floor about old and new forms of oppression, about the role of the 'official communist' Tudeh party and about the influence of US-backed international union federations. On repression, comrade Saleth warned that we should not expect any weakening of the regime's apparatus - the 'legitimacy' endowed by imperialist recognition might actually strengthen it.

On the Tudeh party, he said that fortunately it had lost almost all influence - but that did not mean other left organisations were making any kind of progress. Comrade Mather concurred: Tudeh had "called Torab and me imperialist agents", but it had "lost all credibility" in the eyes of a whole generation. You could be generous and say it had been "a mistake" to support the regime, as Tudeh did. But it had been quite

another thing to actually collaborate with it in fingering left activists, many of whom were subsequently killed by the regime.

On the question of the influence of pro-imperialist organisations such as the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, comrade Mather explained that some workers' leaders in Iran take the view that my enemy's enemy must be my friend. They have been prepared to collaborate with regime change projects. Fortunately most such 'leaders' quickly lose their rank and file base and become seen as mere imperialist stooges.

Nevertheless, both comrades were confident that it was only a matter of time before we would see real working class organisations getting off the ground.

Nationalities

The final session in the school proper was opened by Nasrollah Ghazi of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar), who discussed the question of Iran's national minorities. He pointed out that only 67% of the Iranian population have Farsi as their first language and there are many thousands of Azeris, Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis. They suffer official discrimination, when it comes to language, traditional and religious rights, and, of course, they are denied any form of national representation.

However, it is clear that the struggles of these minorities are entirely led by the various nationalists, who are not interested in linking up with each other, let alone in promoting an all-Iran struggle. As a result, many are easily courted by the imperialists, who have an interest in the breaking up of Iran. For comrade Ghazi the solution is not separation, but centralism. Yes, there must be the right to self-determination, but the influence of imperialism must be strongly resisted. He finished his contribution with the call to "End the Islamic regime" and "For a democratic republic".

There were some useful points added from the floor. For example, comrade Mather pointed to the weaknesses of the national struggles: the Kurds in Iran, for instance, were 'served' by four main nationalist organisations - two close to the US, and one linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Comrade Bridge thought we ought to say more than just "self-determination". With the imperialists attempting to redraw the map of the Middle East, we should emphasise the necessity of working class leadership and the struggle for socialism.

In summing up, comrade Ghazi said he was not for a federation. There was "no solution without socialism after the demise of the Islamic republic".

The day ended with a brief discussion on 'Building solidarity', introduced by comrade Mather. She reminded comrades that Hopi organised in Sweden and Germany as well as Britain, along with the charity set up by Hopi, Workers Fund Iran, which raised funds for those in struggle. She recommended that Hopi organise a campaign around political prisoners in particular. To this end Hopi would give greater priority to its website and Facebook page ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. See pp8-9.
2. See, for example, 'Netanyahu's war wish', February 9 2012.

IMPERIALISM

Changed and unchanged

What do the negotiations with Iran tell us about US policy? This is an edited version of a talk given by **Mike Macnair** to the January 25 Hands Off the People of Iran day school

Since the last national meeting of Hands Off the People of Iran there have been some very substantial changes to the policy of US imperialism, as well as to the policy of the Iranian government, following last year's 'election' of Hassan Rowhani as president (in practice, these were not free elections; more the exercise of choice by the supreme leader). We have also seen the opening of public negotiations - private negotiations had been taking place significantly before the election of Rowhani. And there is an interim deal for an extremely limited relaxation of sanctions in exchange for what is in substance capitulation by the regime on the nuclear enrichment issue.

I use the word 'capitulation', but in reality it was a rational course of action on the part of the regime, taking into account the actual relation of forces, the operation of sanctions and their impact. By contrast, it would in a certain sense have been irrational for the regime to pursue the object of nuclear enrichment against the will of the United States. 'In a certain sense', because there was a certain rationality for the regime in presenting itself as a national champion of the autonomy of Iran and so on. But at the same time, having regard to the global relation of forces, the situation is not one in which the pursuit of nationalist agendas against the will of the United States is a rational course of action for any country. We have seen that spectacularly in the cases of Zimbabwe, Iraq and many more.

US policy

US policy in the wake of the opening up of public negotiations is now extremely obscure. In Egypt there has been substantial restoration of the 'military regime without Mubarak' in the wake of Mushir Sisi's overthrow of the elected Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohamed Mursi, and the US has in effect 'talked both ways' in relation to the regime. The US is not claiming that the army coup is welcome or a step towards 'constitutional rule', which it clearly is not. But it had evidently been seeking some sort of deal with the Muslim Brotherhood before that period, and it is no longer in a position to pursue that agenda now.

Meanwhile, the 'Libyan revolution' turns out merely to have produced a failed state with localised militias. As for Syria, the civil war is ongoing and negotiations do not seem to be leading anywhere - military analysts generally judge that the regime is gradually winning. Various US commentators say that admittedly there has been a lot of aid from Iran and from Hezbollah, plus logistical help and supplies from Russia. Nevertheless, it does look as though the regime is gaining the upper hand. Again the attitude of the United States has been extremely variable: from threatening action following the crossing by the Syrian regime of the "red line" of the use of chemical weapons, to backing a negotiated settlement.

Most recently there has been a revival of the Sunni insurgency linked to al Qa'eda in western Iraq. The Iraqi Shia government is an artefact of the US invasion, but is also an ally of the Iranian regime. US responses are extremely unclear.

In Syria particularly, although there has been anti-regime rhetoric from the US, we cannot speak of solid US support for any part of the opposition. It is true that aid is being sent, with US acceptance, to the opposition groups from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia



Ali Khamenei: supreme leader

and it is very unlikely that they are doing this directly against the will of the United States: they have a degree of autonomy, but not that much. But this does not represent a determination on the part of the US to ensure victory for the opposition.

The Saudi regime and Israel clearly think there has been a turn in US policy towards a deal with Iran, which is against their interests. Part of this policy is diplomatic manoeuvring of the hard cop/soft cop type in connection with the negotiations. But it has gone a little bit further than one would expect, certainly on the part of the Saudis, in that respect. Washington 'Beltway' commentators' pieces are more than usually varied and confused, and do not show a debate between clear lines of action.

There is a school of thought that the US should reorient its policy in the Middle East to reconciliation with the Iranian clerical regime, with the consequences for US alliances which would flow from that, including not just refusing to give active support to the opposition in Syria, but trying to make some kind of deal with the Ba'athist regime. One can see a possible reason for such a course. After the 'Arab spring' the US fairly clearly attempted to make a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and with other Islamists, using its existing alliance with Saudi Arabia as the linchpin. However, what has become clear both in Libya and Syria and also in a sense in Egypt, is the inability of the Sunni Islamist groups to create order.

This is also true in a sense in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood throughout its time in government always had snapping at its heels Salafist tendencies of a more extreme character. This made it necessary for the Brotherhood itself to take a more strongly Islamist line than the Turkish government (which western commentators were holding up as a model for the MB). And then, in turn, the Brotherhood's more strongly Islamist line put it at odds with the Egyptian urban middle class, posed problems for the tourist industry, which is a very substantial part of the Egyptian economy, and also involved conflict with the army, judiciary, etc. Hence the development of a movement of opposition against Mursi and his pre-emptive overthrow

by the army. So Egypt is an instance of the inability of the MB to create order.

To put it another way, these are examples of the inability of *Saudi clients* to create order. The Saudi regime itself is extraordinarily primitive politically: the precarious alliance of the large Saud family with a section of Salafist ulama, a regime which is able to maintain legitimacy solely by the massive disbursement of oil rents to the 'native' population and the maintenance of a large migrant labour underclass. It is unsurprising that translating Saudi support for Salafist policies into countries with large Arab cities and without major oil revenues fails to produce workable political models.

In contrast the Iranian regime clearly *is* able to maintain a sort of order. The Iraqi Shia government, with the backing of Iran, appears to have done that for the imperialists' purposes, though only by 'sectarian cleansing', and so not in Sunni-majority areas. The 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' creates no more than localised sectarian militia operations.

In Syria, similarly, the Islamists - as much as, if not more than, the 'secular' opposition - are proving to be incapable of creating a serious counter-order to the regime in areas they 'control'. It is the same with the Sunni Islamist groups in Libya. And so there is a logic for the US in reorienting its alliances and looking more favourably on the Shia regime in Iran, because at least this regime can create a degree of order.

It cannot be said, however, that this is a definite turn on the part of the US. The agitation for increased sanctions coming out of the Congress is one sign of that. And US commentator Juan Cole suggests that the treasury department is agitating against the easing of sanctions. I am not entirely sure why that would be the case, but, if it is true, it could be because the lifting of sanctions would mean that the US would have to release large quantities of money which it is holding. If that is the reason then it is an extraordinarily short-termist view.

Regime change

There is an alternative line, for which the aim remains regime change in

Iran - and this is not just among Republicans. There are people associated with the Democrats and with the administration who have projected the line that the negotiations are simply a diplomatic stage: escalating demands will be placed on the regime, which will force Iran out of the negotiations and thereby lose its diplomatic cover.

The people favouring this line are actually those who proposed in early 2013 that there should be private negotiations with the clear statement that there were two alternatives on the table. Either there would be a deal, under which Iran would obtain civil nuclear power under tight controls, with international inspectors and so forth, with the regime making as many concessions as were necessary for that to take place; or there would be a full-scale US attack. Not an Israeli surgical strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, but a full-scale US air, naval and missile attack. In other words, not an invasion, but a 'shock and awe' bombing campaign with an emphasis on taking out Iranian air and naval capabilities, as well as its potential nuclear capacity.

It seems to be agreed across the board that the 'surgical strike' option is not real, that the real options are either a negotiated solution or a full-scale bombing campaign. But at the same time there is also a lot of talk presenting Israel as the hard cop - 'If we don't get a solution soon, then Israel will attack' - giving the impression that the United States will be unable to keep its attack dog on the leash for an indefinite period of time.

We should remember in this context that the long period of sanctions against Iraq, combined with episodic military attacks, in the period 1991-2002 was punctuated by negotiations, by partial relaxations of sanctions, by 'a deal is possible' type periods - and still it ended in war.

Indeed, when Lord Goldsmith, briefed by US lawyers, presented the legal justification for war against Iraq in 2003, he claimed that the 1991 war had never actually finished. Therefore, since there had been a breach by the Iraqis of the terms of the ceasefire laid out in 1991, there was a right to take military action without further legal authorisation.

The context then is the persisting sanctions regime. We in Hopi have repeatedly made the point that the 'sanctions regime' is a euphemistic term, that it is in reality a commercial blockade or siege of Iran. These activities at any time before the very recent past would be understood as acts of war. The conduct of the United States and of the western powers in relation to this regime is a form of warfare against Iran. It is not perhaps as obvious or as immediate and spectacular as bombing campaigns, invasions and so on: but it is, nevertheless, a form of warfare.

It is a form of warfare which again, as we have repeatedly demonstrated, is actually aimed at the civilian population. In spite of the *talk* of targeting the regime, the reality is that those close to it are always able to find a way round the sanctions. They have been throughout. Recently, thanks to the corruption scandal in Turkey, one of the means by which actors within the Iranian regime have been able to find ways around the sanctions - and indeed even enrich themselves - has been revealed to the world. The people who are hit by the sanctions are the civilian population, for whom the payment of wages, medical capabilities, etc have been adversely affected.

So it is not only the case that the United States has been for some years pursuing a *war* of sanctions (even if this has now been slightly mitigated by their very partial lifting through the negotiations), but this is also actually a *terrorist* policy. Terrorism, to the extent that the word is not *purely* ideological, consists of attacks directed at the civilian population with the purpose of inducing fear and terror. That is what the sanctions policy is.

The question then is, why has the US been pursuing a war policy against Iran?

Carter doctrine

The long-term background is that of the Carter doctrine, which was actually formulated by president Jimmy before the outbreak of the Iranian revolution of 1979. According to this doctrine, it is essential for the security of the United States that no 'outside power' (it is unclear what exactly that means) should be capable of conducting military operations in the Persian Gulf. This is not peculiar.

There are all sorts of similar US ‘national security’ doctrines, the most spectacular of which was adopted in the late 1940s: that it is essential for the security of the United States that the US navy has unrestricted access to the Chinese coast. That is to say that the US does not, still, recognise that there is such a thing as Chinese territorial waters.

But the question in a sense is, why is the Carter doctrine in place? Because of it, the overthrow of the shah of Iran was viewed as an immediate attack on US security; because of it, the US backed Iran in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, both directly and through the agency of Britain and so on. Why?

The very standard, commonplace leftwing explanation is that the United States needs cheap oil as the basis for the ‘consumer society’. Now certainly Carter’s public motivations for this doctrine were based on that - that is what he gave as his public explanation. But in fact US operations in the Middle East have tended since the 1980s (and certainly including the Iran sanctions) to *increase* the price of oil, not reduce it. Moreover, US interests and involvement in the region goes back to the displacement of Britain and France in the 1940s and 1950s: when - for example - Britain and the US overthrew the Mossadeq government of Iran in 1953, the upshot was that the oil companies that were nationalised under Mossadeq passed from British ownership prior to nationalisation to predominate US ownership under the shah. Moreover, at this time the problem was hardly one of access to cheap oil: in that period, the US was a major producer and exporter of oil, so it cannot be the case that the US economy was being strangled by the high cost of oil and that this was the reason for those US operations in the 1950s.

Today, the US is moving back in the direction of ‘energy independence’ through fracking and so on, though it does not expect to attain the status it enjoyed in the 1950s until around 2020-25. But, although events since 2011 have led to disorientation of US policy and to a loss of control, Washington remains deeply concerned with the Middle East and the need to manoeuvre in an agile way, which is difficult due to the US constitutional structure.

Control

The immediate question, therefore, is actually one of global control. With regard to the Middle East the question is posed not in relation to cheap oil as the foundation of the consumer society, but as oil as a munition of war. Oil which drives tanks. Oil which drives military aircraft, trucks and so on, none of which can be driven by electrical power. So that what the US wants from control of the Middle East is the ability to turn off the taps to other hypothetical rival powers.

Again, we can go back further than this. The US has been interested in global control since the 1940s - predating the cold war obviously. In 1941-47 the initial aim of US foreign policy was to prevent the re-emergence of the British empire. And indeed in 1944-47 the US was still looking to use its alliance with the Soviet Union to block any sort of deal which would lead to the revival of the British empire. There is a very useful discussion of this in Ben Steill’s recent book, *The battle of Bretton Woods*, which is about global monetary policy and US-UK rivalry at that time.

The underlying issue, at the end of the day, is the global reserve currency and the advantages that come with it, centrally in financial markets. In this respect the US has taken over the role which Britain enjoyed from the 19th century down to 1940. If the global financial taps are under your control you can dictate access to markets - in particular markets for capital goods. You can also dictate access to raw

materials at favourable terms (which does not necessarily mean cheaply). In the situation that the US has been in since its effective defeat in Indochina in the middle 1970s, it has actually been *advantageous* to the United States for the price of oil to be high, as compared to its rivals in Europe and particular China, which does not have any significant oil resources.

It is a common error - and a standard piece of ideology - for bourgeois economists to claim that the relative strength of the currency is immediately related to the strength of the economy, and that if there is a strong economy there will automatically be a strong currency, and therefore exchange rates will auto-adjust in a floating currency regime. But it does not work like that.

The strength of currency relies, at the end of the day, on *the ability of the state to enforce payment of debts*. The currencies we use are not gold, but debt instruments. And at the end of the day the ability to enforce payment of debts flows from military strength. In turn military strength flows from productive capabilities - but productive capability under certain conditions, the conditions of global, great-power war. The US is the world’s top-dog country because it won in 1941-45. Just as Britain was the world’s top-dog country because it won 1789-1815.

This brings us back towards the concrete. The first point is that the United States remains absolutely dominant, despite being in relative decline. It is undoubtedly the case that the US armed forces are more powerful than the next 10 armed forces put together.

The consequence of being the world’s top-dog country is that financial transactions tend to run through your financial centre, and your domestic economy tends to become financialised. Amongst other effects, ‘onshore’ land values, and hence rents and other housing costs, tend to rise, so that in turn wages have to go up. The result is the ‘offshoring’ of productive capacity elsewhere in search of lower land and wage costs. This, in turn, undermines the *long-term* basis of the military power which makes the country world top-dog. You can keep paying for the immediate military power out of the tribute received from retaining reserve currency status and control of a major financial centre; but this financial tribute flows increasingly from the *appearance* of strength, rather than from underlying *productive* dominance, leading to military strength. In order to retain the *appearance* of strength, it becomes necessary to take military initiatives of one sort or another to demonstrate that you are strong (while as far as possible avoiding a *great-power* war which would demonstrate the hollowness of that claim).

In the period down to 1975, the US’s policy sought to create an order beneficial to global capitalist development. However, since the defeat in Indochina, US practice has changed: initially aiming to give the USSR and its allies a taste of ‘insurgency’, and beginning with Mozambique, Angola and Cambodia, the US demonstrated its power by simple *destruction* - reducing states and societies to rubble and warlordism. Libya is only the most recent example.

Going back to the debates among the various authors in the Beltway commentariat, they are very much concerned with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Fallujah and so on; they are desperately concerned that the course of action that the United States is currently engaged in will make it appear weak. The result is profound irrationalities in decision-making, and one of the features of that which is visible in the analysts’ debate is over whether to reorient relations towards Iran. This is pretty clearly a rational

course of action from the point of view of US capital, but at the same time, because of the danger that it will make the US *state* appear weak, there is another school of thought, which argues particularly for much bigger overt US intervention in Syria and the drawing of ‘red lines’ against Iran (for example, against continued support for the Syrian Ba’athist regime).

So there is a real risk of the war of sanctions turning into a bombing war. The fact that there are negotiations and a few sanctions have been lifted does not mean that this risk has been wholly removed.

Counterreformation

The second issue is that we are not just in a period of the relative decline of the United States, but in a period of the decline of capitalism as a social order, as a practice.

The form of this decline is in a sense just like the period of the counterreformation in feudalism, in which there was an aggressive state promotion of feudalism and Catholicism. We are in the counterreformation period of capitalism. Neoliberal globalisation is partly in the interests of the United States, because the US is too much in relative decline to be able to afford the concessions to rival powers that it made during the cold war period or the ‘golden age’ of the 1950s and 60s. But neoliberal globalisation also partly reflects an aspiration of *capital* to restore another ‘golden age’ - the period before 1917 - and to get rid of all the concessions that were made to the working class subsequently (universal suffrage, the welfare state in Britain and so on). This aim of going back implies a much more aggressive state promotion of state-backed pseudo-capitalism.

And that too is present in the negotiations phase in relation to Iran. As Yassamine Mather has written in a number of recent articles, the Rowhani regime is actually more aggressively neoliberal, or more overtly, ideologically neoliberal, than the Ahmadinejad regime was.

There was a lot of talk after 2009, and to an extent continuing today, amongst the liberal left to the effect that ‘neoliberalism is over’, ‘neoliberalism is dead’ and so on. But the reality is that in the five years which have passed since the crash of 2009 we now talk the language of ‘structural reform’ rather than that of ‘neoliberal globalisation’. There is some nibbling at the edges of bringing back protectionism, in one way or another. But the underlying neoliberal offensive of capital against the working class - and of the United States against the subordinate powers through aggressive trade liberalisation, through demands that wages must fall to ‘competitive’ levels and welfare systems be cut - is not only still with us, but it is very much alive and kicking. So any idea that the negotiations between the US and Iran will result in better conditions for the Iranian working class is an illusion. Whether there are negotiations or not, whether sanctions are removed or not, the US will continue to demand ‘structural reform’, the end of subsidies, wage cuts, (and in private, the suppression of trade unions), and so on.

In conclusion, there is a real, continuing danger of a reversion to the policy of regime change and hot war. Most of the sanctions - or, more bluntly, the US-led siege of Iran - continue; and, even if all the sanctions were lifted, there is the continuing pressure of US-led neoliberalism, which the Rowhani government clearly *supports*, for attacks on working people and the poor.

Do not imagine, therefore, that the negotiations and any potential deal will remove the continuing threats against the people of Iran emanating from the United States ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

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MIDDLE EAST



Egypt 2011: before the fall

Legacy of the Arab spring

Three years after the start of the mass revolts **Yassamine Mather** assesses the situation in Tunisia and Egypt

The Arab masses have nothing much to celebrate following the third anniversary of the Arab uprisings. There is little sign of the kind of political freedom called for by the protestors.

In Egypt the anniversary was marked by rival demonstrations of supporters and opponents of the military government. Dozens of people have been killed in the last few days, as police broke up anti-government protests. Hundreds have died since July, when the army deposed Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Mursi. Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif, speaking to the BBC, summed up the mood of many: "Basically, this isn't the third anniversary for the revolution that we were hoping for. The security state is back and also a great many activists are in jail." Ironically the official gatherings to celebrate the 2011 uprising, in Tahrir Square and elsewhere, were organised by the military, who are keen to portray themselves as the saviours of the nation - in reality they are the saviours of the ruling elite.

In Tunisia and in Egypt opposition to the rulers, whether 'moderate' Islamists (Tunisia) or the secular military (Egypt), is not tolerated. The economic situation is catastrophic. There are no new jobs - on the contrary unemployment and uncertainty is on the rise and the majority of the population cannot afford many basic goods. The jails are full of political prisoners and the banning of oppositionists is part and parcel of the new order.

Having said that, at least in Tunisia and Egypt there is some kind of political life. But in Syria, where in the early days of the uprising opponents of the Assad regime raised demands for political freedom, the 'revolution' has been hijacked to such an extent that there is now in effect a war by proxy between Iran's Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia.

As for Libya, the situation could not be more chaotic. Genuine opposition to the regime of Muammar Gaddafi had

no chance of surviving once the US, France, the UK and Italy got involved - cheered on by sections of the European 'left'. The new 'democracy' the US brought to Libya is in reality gunpoint chaos masquerading as government, while armed militias - some political, others just criminal - including appendages of al Qa'eda, rule the country. The militias are clearly powerful enough to kidnap the country's prime minister and half of the Egyptian embassy staff. In fact the new 'democratic government' in Libya is itself a coalition made up of political representatives of the various militias.

In such circumstances it is difficult to talk of an Arab spring. However, the mass protests, strikes and other events witnessed over the last three years, including the coming to power of 'moderate' and not so moderate Islamists, will have long-term effects in the region, and this article will attempt to explain the political and economic reasons for the upsurge, as well as discussing the consequences of the defeat of the Arab spring.

Background

On December 17 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year old fruit seller, set himself on fire in front of a government building, sparking riots across Tunisia and beyond.

Tunisians, followed by Egyptians, demonstrated against the constant degradation of their living conditions. They had tolerated political dictatorship, corruption and cronyism during the Ben Ali and Mubarak eras. But now they were angry at the impotence and subservience of their rulers *vis-à-vis* US imperialist interventions in the region and felt humiliated by their acceptance of continued Palestinian oppression. In addition those rulers had since the early 1980s pushed through economic restructuring programmes and a neoliberal economic agenda unchallenged. Economic misery, frustration with ever increasing unemployment and a growing gap between rich and poor fuelled the revolt.

In countries ruled by semi-secular governments (Egypt, Tunisia, Syria) the super-rich were identified as pro-western, decadent and anti-Islamic. Yet these governments' ruthless repression of the left had created a situation where Islamists, often supported by Saudi funds, could benefit from the political vacuum created when protestors took to the streets, expressing frustrations built up over decades.

Many outside the region were surprised by the fact that demonstrations starting in Tunisia spread to Egypt and beyond, but the reason for this lies in the common colonial history of the region. With the exception of Egypt the Arab states are recent creations, less than a century old, and, although the mass media is keen to blame some of the more recent conflicts on a 'Sunni-Shia divide', there is a more complicated story of arbitrary borders dividing nationalities, of local rulers deliberately chosen from religious minorities and imposed by the colonial powers aiming to divide and rule.

Most of these countries were part of the Ottoman empire, which in the 17th century boasted 32 provinces, but by the early 20th century its collapse was well underway. Syria, for example, was part of the Ottoman empire until 1918 (from 1516): it was an Ottoman *elayat* (province) governed by a *vali* (administrator).

Egypt was a 'khedivate' (autonomous tributary state) until 1882, when in effect it became part of the British empire. The country became a British protectorate in 1915 and finally gained formal independence in 1922 under Muhammad Ali. This dynasty lasted until 1952, when king Farouk was deposed by a military coup and the Free Officers Movement, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, came to power.

Nationalist and Ba'athist regimes gained prominence during the cold war, when they benefited from Soviet financial and political support. Pro-Soviet 'official communist' parties, some with considerable working class

support, were instructed by Moscow to dissolve and join the Ba'athists. After the collapse of the eastern bloc, nationalist bureaucrats at the head of these states slid easily back into the western fold. They set themselves up as semi-dynastic dictators and became authoritarian supporters of the neoliberal economic agenda - vanguards of IMF-style economic restructuring programmes, privatising state-owned assets and often enriching their own close allies. Contrary to what the defenders of the 'free market' economy tell us, authoritarian regimes not only embrace neoliberal economic policies, but they can push forward such policies with little or no opposition, having already suppressed secular, leftwing forces and labour activists.

In fact Islamists, often associated with the bazaar and industry, also benefit from free-market economic liberalisation, whether in power or in opposition. Rulers such as Mubarak, Ali, Assad and Gaddafi survived by imposing repressive measures. They decimated the revolutionary left, but generally left the Islamists alone.

It is not difficult to see how, for example, Egypt was affected by the world economic crisis of 2008. International Monetary Fund figures show the rate of growth falling from 8.7% in 2006 to 4.6% in 2009 and 1.0% in 2010-11 - and, of course, these figures do not show the growing gap between rich and poor.

- Egypt's foreign currency income relied on the export of goods to Europe, but in 2008-09 merchandise exports dropped from 33% to 15%.

- Major European and US transnationals - eg, Orange, IBM and Xerox - which had benefited from cheap skilled labour in Cairo and Alexandria, were quick to close down or cut back on production.

- Tourism, accounting for 11% of the country's GDP, was also affected by the economic crisis. The number of tourists in the first six months of 2010 dropped to 732,000 - down from 1,029,000 for the same period in 2009.

- Remittances from Persian Gulf countries were also a significant factor. In Egypt 5% of national GDP came from this source. Post-2008 there were massive reductions in many projects in the Persian Gulf area; many construction plans were abandoned and workers were laid off.

We should also remember that US politics was tied to and dictated economic rewards in the Middle East. Dictatorial regimes soft on Israel were beneficiaries of US loans, including Mubarak's Egypt. Governments prepared to trade with Israel were rewarded - qualifying, for instance, for duty-free exports to the US.

Qualified industrial zones (QIZ) were supposed to be an extension of the US-Israel Free Trade Agreement. They were supposed to help 'broaden support' for the Middle East peace process and produce 'tangible economic benefits' for Jordan, Egypt, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, by stimulating their economies and increasing employment. However, a condition was attached: they had to agree to import at least 12% of their goods from Israel. A form of bribery - financial gain in exchange for political obedience.

Between 2005 and 2008, Egyptian QIZ exports to the US grew by 57%. In 2010 they made up 40% of the country's exports to the US, while the textile sector had over 700 companies. The economic crisis in the US had a major effect on this sector, reducing foreign currency incomes.

Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries, as major oil producers with small populations, played a significant role in the economy of the Arab countries, and here lies the problem that later forced a rethink in Washington. These powerful, small countries were and remain the main source of funding for the Muslim Brotherhood and the more Jihadist Islamic forces.

However, support for the Islamic movement was not purely reactionary. It expressed a resentment of Mubarak's

subservience to the US and the Sadat/ Mubarak peace deals with Israel - a resentment of the political implications of QIZs.

Egyptians faced additional hardship, as the price of all food products, including rice, wheat and corn, increased sharply in international markets from 2006 to 2008. In particular, the price of rice rose threefold in a five-year period, meaning it went from around \$600 per ton in 2003 to more than \$1,800 in May 2008.

Despair resulting from the economic situation; anger at the role of the army and the police, and at the impotence of Arab rulers in dealing with the Palestinian issue; the psychological effects of the defeat of Ba’athism in Iraq, seen by many Arabs as an insult to their national and regional Arab pride - all played a crucial part in these uprisings.

Muslim Brotherhood

There is no denying that in the absence of any serious secular organisations (most leftwing groups were banned, their members arrested and in some cases executed) at the time of Mubarak’s downfall, MB was the largest, best organised political force in the country. The Brotherhood’s success in forming the government should not be interpreted as proof of the popularity of political Islam: rather a reflection of the weakness of other political forces.

It was therefore inevitable that, once MB tried to impose sharia law on every aspect of society, once it became clear that it had no serious economic plan apart from continuing the neoliberal economic policies of the previous regime, it lost much of its support base. Most bourgeois parties that come to power after mass protests end up adopting ‘pragmatic’ measures, and this was true of MB, as far as both economic and international policies were concerned - all talk of economic justice was conveniently forgotten. However, the rhetoric used regarding religious laws was uncompromising and in fact became more hard-line as time went by.

The Brotherhood’s political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, won 47% of the seats in the Egyptian parliament in January 2012, when media reports concentrated on the imposition of Sharia law, a ban on alcohol, gender segregation, etc. However, Egyptian business largely welcomed the FJP victory, which was said to herald optimism about economic recovery. MB’s Islamic capitalist economy, like the one in Iran’s Islamic republic, was very much a compromise between two views: interventionist and *laissez-faire*.

One thing is clear: for all the talk of ‘moving towards an Islamic economy’ (interest-free banking and all), Egyptian banks and the stock market did not see any economic threat from the rule of MB. The Brotherhood’s economists were well aware that Islamic banking encompassed a tiny proportion (less than four percent) of the local sector and the FJP was not in a rush to change things. On the contrary, the party’s strategy was to encourage depositors and borrowers.

A powerful group of Islamist industrial and commercial leaders, headed by Khairat el-Shater - a multimillionaire businessman and former political prisoner of the Mubarak era who had been a victim of assets confiscation in the past - was an FJP strategist and senior leader of the Muslim Brotherhood by 2012. El-Shater and his close partners were in favour of a liberal, market economy and a ‘business-friendly’ climate. These multi-millionaires were given the task of leading the ‘Renaissance Project’, the Brotherhood’s ambitious scheme to oversee economic planning, public administration, health and

education.

At the same time the Brotherhood’s interventionist faction pursued a policy of export substitution in cooperation with the private sector; it called for control of the budget deficit and public debt, and restrictions on public spending (although the minimum wage was increased in the first year of the MB government). This faction also called for measures to strengthen competition, anti-trust legislation and the raising of the ceiling for tax exemptions.

The most damaging part of MB’s economic policy was its attitude towards poverty. It was a top-down approach, relying on charity rather than better wages and more rights for workers. In opposition and at election time MB had embarked on far-reaching, organised charity work, a kind of continuous financing of support through charities (many set up with funds originating in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states). Some FJP supporters were also advocating making *zakat* - a form of charitable donation, equivalent to 2.5% of income, that Muslims are supposed to pay to help the poor - compulsory, although MB was not in power long enough to implement it. From the onset (even at the time of proposing the electoral programme) the party separated the issue of poverty from economic development and planning, classifying it as policy for ‘social justice’. Distributing food parcels paid for by Saudi Arabia might work during an election campaign. However, in a country of 70 million, where almost a third of the population live below the official poverty line, permanent charity was not going to be a sustainable option.

FJP election propaganda promised support for workers in the tourism industry, whose income supports 11% of the population, yet it was obvious that the drive for prohibitions on alcohol consumption and swimwear, and towards gender segregation would adversely impact on mass tourism - cheap package holidays to sea resorts, for example, as well as the upper end of the market. Then in June 2013 Mursi appointed a leading figure from the hard-line Islamist group, Al-Gama’a al-Islamiya, which claims responsibility for the murder of dozens of tourists in 1997, as governor of Luxor province. Egyptian tourism is not doing well, but the appointment infuriated tourism workers, who protested by blocking the entrance to government offices in Luxor.

The Muslim Brotherhood used every opportunity to attack the democratic gains of the uprising, often relying on its ally, the army - ironically the very force that eventually removed it from power. The ‘constitutional decree’ Mursi adopted allowed him to modify legal proposals in line with sharia law - but more than 70% of the population had refused to participate in the referendum to approve the Islamic constitution.

There was discrimination against the Christian minority, constituting 10% of the population, and in recent months it has faced new forms of sectarianism and intimidation. In accordance with sharia law, financial levies known as *jizya* (originally a 9th century form of taxation on non-Muslims) were imposed on Copts by the Islamic gangs. Christians also suffered state persecution through the criminalisation of so-called blasphemy, which was part and parcel of the Islamist constitution pushed through by Mursi.

Mursi in particular became a hate figure after he labelled all those who opposed him agents of foreign powers. In his last speech before the army stepped in he lamented: “How can the best of leaders make major achievements in such a poisonous atmosphere?”

Before last summer’s coup MB had lost many of its supporters. However,

the subsequent ban, repression and arrests directed against the Brotherhood have undoubtedly restored some of its popularity amongst sections of the population. Islamist hard-liners are very good at playing the victim when they are in opposition, even though, as Egypt demonstrates when the MB had a cosy relationship with the army, they may be willing to become ruthless dictators.

The military coup in the summer of 2013 - just like in 2011, when the armed forces intervened to depose Mubarak - had one aim: to put an end to the revolutionary process. The longer the protests continued, the stronger the fear of genuine revolution.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates continue to pour billions of dollars into the Egyptian economy. However, as in Tunisia, Syria and Libya, Egypt’s economic and political problems are so endemic, so serious that no amount of cash can resolve the situation even in the short term.

Tunisia

The situation in Tunisia is slightly better, only because the Islamists have backed down from many of their original sharia-based proposals. On January 27 the Tunisian parliament voted by 216 votes to 200 for a new constitution - the first since Ben Ali’s overthrow and the result of a compromise between the Islamists and the secular opposition.

However, conflict between the two continues. Two opposition leaders have been assassinated, a number of soldiers and policemen have been killed and there are reports of suicide attacks at beach resorts. As in Egypt, tourism is badly affected by new Islamic legislation, lack of security and political uncertainty. There are reports of torture taking place in Tunisian jails, sometimes resulting in death.

In today’s Tunisia you can be hassled, harassed, assaulted and even threatened with death if you dare express an opinion not to the liking of the Islamists. If you are a woman you can face all this just for wearing ‘inappropriate’ clothes or for leaving home after dark. While the mass media presents Tunisia as a rare, positive exception to the

disappointments following the Arab spring, those living in the country have a different opinion.

Lessons

What can we learn from the events of the last three years? It is far too early to judge the significance of the Arab spring in terms of the revolutionary process in the region, Arab unification and threats of war. But the obvious conclusions are probably those that affect both imperialism and the peoples of the region.

First and foremost, 35 years after the first Islamic revolution (Iran 1979), even if Islamists come to power in another Middle Eastern country (as they did in Egypt) the following would apply:

- They are unlikely to be allies of Iran’s Shia regime. On the contrary there will probably be antagonism towards non-Arab Iran.
- Political Islam is unlikely to remain in power, as in Egypt. The Islamists will not be able to keep any of their promises about ‘social justice’ in the absence of any economic plan beyond those of neoliberal capitalism.
- For all the money it has spent, Saudi Arabia will not be able to control the plethora of Islamic movements it has financed.

The above issues have already had dramatic political consequences, including a change in US foreign policy towards Iran and Syria. Negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue and the Geneva talks on Syria are both part of this. There is once more an urgency in Washington to ‘resolve’ the Palestinian issue and this explains US secretary of state John Kerry’s shuttle diplomacy, rushing between nuclear deals, Syrian talks and the Palestine-Israel negotiations.

For the peoples of the region there will be further consequences. The political and economic issues that caused the Arab uprising are as pertinent today as they were three years ago. However, political Islam is no longer considered in such high esteem by so many and it is not viewed as an agent for fundamental change. This does present a window of opportunity, albeit a small one, for the revolutionary left ●

Fighting fund

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With just a day to go to reach our £1,500 fighting fund target for January, our total stands tantalisingly short at £1,411. I know we can start 2014 on a successful note and comrades will come up with the extra £89 we need.

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The highlight of this week’s contributions was the £50 in cash given to our editor at last Saturday’s Hands Off the People of Iran conference. It came from two Iranian comrades living in Britain, who are grateful for the solidarity this paper consistently shows to their struggle against the twin enemies of US imperialism, with its threats to launch attacks on Iran, and the Tehran clerical

dictatorship, which forced so many into exile.

Another £35 came from the US itself, where *Weekly Worker* subscriber AP now finds himself. He has added that amount to his sub. Then there were two PayPal contributions - £5 from OC and £10 from MD, who is now something of a regular donor. Finally we were stood in good stead by our standing order regulars - JT (£75), DS (£35), PM (£30), PJ (£13), DC (£12), JM (£10) and CC (£5). All that added £280 to our total.

Let me now appeal specifically to our online readers, of which there were 11,259 last week. Since the largest slice of that readership inevitably comes to our website on a Thursday, when they can access newly published articles like this one, please click on that PayPal button before you go. Or, of course, you can make that bank transfer as soon as you’ve finished scouring this week’s *Weekly Worker*!

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What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ 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 should 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’.

■ 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.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ 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.

weekly Worker

Far right on
the rise
across Europe

UAF demands state ban

The leader of a Hungarian far-right party was allowed to visit London - despite protests. Daniel Harvey reports

The leader of the far-right nationalist Jobbik Party in Hungary, Gábor Vona, made a trip to London last weekend to speak to supporters living here. The Jobbik Party currently has 43 seats in the Hungarian parliament, after achieving a fairly spectacular breakthrough in 2010, plus three MEPs. *The Guardian* dubbed him “Europe’s most successful fascist”.¹

The SWP-dominated Unite Against Fascism managed to organise a petition with 14,000 signatures, which it delivered to home secretary Theresa May, asking her to ban Vona from entering the UK. This was done under the pretext that any far-right presence would likely trigger attacks on migrants and other minorities. It was widely expected that this would succeed, but in the end he was allowed to enter.

Vona’s open letter to Theresa May, dated January 21, explains: “I would like to inform you that the sole purpose of my visit is to address Hungarian citizens only. There are hundreds of thousands living and working in the UK and I would like to present our election programme to them just like any other Hungarian political party.”² In this way he was rejecting claims made by anti-fascists and others that he was planning to attend a joint meeting with representatives of the British National Party and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party of Greece.

When Vona actually arrived, he was chased across London by about 150 anti-fascist demonstrators from the UAF, the anarchist Anti-Fascist Network, and the Brixton Black Revolutionary Socialists. Three separate venues cancelled his bookings at the last moment under pressure from activists and the bad publicity surrounding the visit, the last one only half an hour before the event was due to start.

Holborn tube station was then used as a redirection point by his supporters, but they ended up being trapped inside, unable to leave because of various activists blocking the exits. After some time, and under a lot of police protection, about 100 Jobbik supporters were taken to a rain-sodden corner of Hyde Park, where they listened to a short speech by Vona. They were interrupted by shouts from protestors, one who was videoed shouting, “I’m a Hungarian Jew - you murdered my family!”³

Patriotic

Jobbik has taken legal action against those who describe the party as ‘far-right’. It does accept the term ‘radical rightwing’, but prefers to call itself ‘patriotic’. Its name is a play on words in Hungarian - ‘Jobb’ meaning both ‘right’ and ‘choice’.

The organisation began life in 2002 as a rightwing youth group made up of Christian university students, before being founded as a party in 2003. In 2006 it went into an electoral alliance with the rival Hungarian Justice and Life Party. Only gaining 2.2% of the votes, the leadership rejected the alliance and decided to go it alone.

After this, it never really looked



Jobbik: uniformed wing

back, achieving its stunning electoral results. It almost bumped the Hungarian Socialist Party out of second place in the 2009 European elections, and managed to squeeze the Liberal Alliance of Free Democrats out altogether.

It has close ties with the Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guards), a paramilitary street movement founded in 2007. Members are sworn to “defend a physically, spiritually and intellectually defenceless Hungary”. The Gárda said its aim was to fill the gap left by the Hungarian police, but this ‘gap’ is invariably described as the police’s failure to solve “gypsy crime”.

Vona wore a Gárda jacket at the opening of the parliament in Hungary in May 2010 in defiance of the movement’s proscription in 2009. Even so, the Gárda has kept reappearing under new names, and was prominent in a major protest alongside Jobbik members against the World Jewish Congress held in Budapest on May 4 2013. Jobbik claimed the congress was a “Jewish attempt to buy up Hungary”.

The movement has a distinctly Christian side to it. A favourite minister for this rightwing milieu, Lóránt Hegedűs of the Hungarian Reformed Church, was originally an MP for the Justice and Life Party between 1998 and 2003, and he invited Holocaust denier David Irving to his church as a “special guest”.

Opposition to Jobbik from the mainstream conservative Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Union) and centre-left Socialist Party has been hit and miss, to say the least. They did take part in a rally in December 2012, in order to denounce a notorious anti-Semitic speech made by Jobbik MP Márton Gyöngyösi. He had called for the state to draw up a list of Hungarian Jews, with a particular focus on those who are in parliament or work for the government, because of what he said was the danger of “control by Israel”.

However, Fidesz has hardly been a consistent opponent of Jobbik. In local government, it has had no objection to forming alliances with Jobbik councillors, and in general has adopted

a ‘broad tent’ approach to the nationalist right. Similarly, the Hungarian socialists have collaborated with Jobbik on some issues - for example, a petition calling for government interventions in the energy industry to be investigated was signed by both Socialist Party and Jobbik MPs.

In 2010, the SP actually offered Jobbik the chairmanship of the National Security Committee in exchange for the budget office, which the SP wanted. Both the petition and this deal were withdrawn after the public furore they caused.

History

This kind of extreme chauvinist politics is nothing new in Hungary - or special to it. In fact it constitutes part of the resurgence of the politics of the 1930s across Europe - from Golden Dawn in Greece, the Northern League in Italy, to the Front National in France. The BNP’s Nick Griffin has actively courted Jobbik, citing what he called a “common core” of shared values between the BNP, Jobbik and Golden Dawn, and calling for an alliance to be formed between them after the European elections in May.⁴

In the case of Hungary, this recreation of 1930s politics has had a literal meaning in the rehabilitation of admiral Miklós Horthy, whose dictatorship allied itself with Nazi Germany. The above-mentioned cleric, Lóránt Hegedűs, has had a picture of the admiral outside his church in Budapest for several years, and in 2013 erected a statue in his honour. Of course, that attracted protests - in this case from many wearing yellow stars, indicating his complicity in the Holocaust. Horthy oversaw the sending of 437,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in the space of two months in 1944, most of whom were murdered there.

Apologists claim that this only happened because he was forced into complacency by the Nazis after his initial refusal. Of course, this is somewhat belied by the anti-Jewish measures Horthy himself introduced from 1920 onwards, beginning with

sharply limiting the number allowed to attend university. In 1941 sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews was banned. Indeed, it was the Horthy government which introduced the registration system for Jews, like the one supported by Jobbik’s Gyöngyösi, which made it so simple and easy for the Germans to round up the Jewish population.

Anti-Semites in Hungary do not hide their history, as neo-fascist groups in Germany and Britain are more likely to. Some revel in the history of the Holocaust in the country. For instance, in 2009 pigs’ feet were scattered over the site of a memorial to the Jews driven into the river Danube and shot by German soldiers in 1944. And the paramilitary Gárda can only have been a calculated replay of the Iron Guard which actively participated in Nazi atrocities in the Balkans.

The strategy of the establishment now appears to be to allow fascists a platform in order to expose them publicly. The best example of this is Nick Griffin’s car crash on *Question Time* in 2009. No doubt, similar thinking underlay Theresa May’s decision to allow Vona into the country to speak. This approach seems to have been partially successful with the BNP, but we have yet to see what will take place in Hungary.

But the popular-frontist tactics of the UAF, whose anti-fascism is broad enough to welcome Conservatives onto its platforms, results in it calling on the state to ban figures like Vona, even though the SWP is aware that such bans set a precedent that can be used against the left ●

Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/jan/22/fascist-hungarian-gabor-vona-immigrant-uk.
2. www.jobbik.com/open_letter_vona_g%C3%A1bor_rt_hon_mrs_theresa_may_uk_home_secretary.
3. <http://antifascistnetwork.wordpress.com/2014/01/28/neo-nazi-jobbik-party-blockaded-in-london/#more-1417>.
4. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/gabor-vona-hungarian-fascists-jobbik-left-homeless-for-london-visit-9086417.html.

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