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*'The basis of socialism is the human being... Socialism is the movement*

*to restore human being's conscious will.'*

**Mansoor Hekmat**

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!



**Mina Ahadi**

## Condemn Islamic regime of Iran's attacks on teachers and workers in Iran

The representatives of Islamic regime of Iran are holding a party tonight at 6pm to celebrate Iranian New Year here at Kensington Great Hall in London while their colleagues back in Iran are turning people's lives into hell. They stop people from having fun, they attack private parties to arrest men and women who dance together or drink, they patrol streets to stop young people getting together and having fun, they arrest and flog girls who are considered to be improperly dressed and they dread any happy music. Right now in Iran they have brought special police forces out in thousands and have created some sort of a military state to stop celebrations and happiness. So how dare they pretend to be civil and hold parties in places like London?

Their New Year gift for majority of Iranian people is poverty, unemployment, misery and tears. Many Iranian parents are not able to buy presents and new clothes and good food for

their children, hundreds of unemployed and homeless people and street children are deprived of a warm and cosy environment around these festive times, workers in many factories and towns are on strike and protests because they have not been paid for months.

As they pretend to be human and celebrate New Year in London, hundreds of teachers and workers have to spend their New Year in prisons just for demanding their wages and better work conditions, a great number of families mourn the deaths of their loved ones who have been executed by this cruel and fascist regime.

Many Iranians in London have run away from these people in fear of their lives, many have not been able to see their families for years, so how do they

expect Iranians to attend their parties and pretend nothing has happened while their families must endure the pain of passing yet another New Year without their loved ones?

Worker-communist Party of Iran will not allow this puppet show go on in peace, we will not allow representatives of a criminal and terrorist government wear innocent masks and hold 'cultural' events while their colleagues make lives hell for people in Iran. This government must go; its toppling will be the best New Year present for millions of Iranians.

Join us and say no to the regime of sexual apartheid, execution and terrorism. Join our picket and let our voices be heard!

**Worker-communist  
Party of Iran- UK  
March 21, 2007**

## Stop labelling us Muslims!

I would like to talk about a campaign that been influential in Germany over the past several weeks. I have lived in Germany for 11 years; I was first interviewed on stoning by national German TV seven years ago. When

at home, I watched the interview and saw that they had introduced me as 'Mina Ahadi, a Muslim woman'. I immediately called to complain. I asked if a German politician or spokesperson was interviewed on your TV programme, would

you label her a 'Christian woman'? Not only myself - but three and a half million people from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and so on, have been given one label - Muslim.

Another time, during the uproar over the Mohammad caricatures, I

saw a bearded man saying in an interview that 3 and a half million Muslims in Germany were offended by the caricatures. In Germany, the Islamic organisations see themselves as the representative of 3 and a half million Muslims, of which I

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am one, and the government recognises them as such too.

I have stood up against the policies of the German



and Islamic organisations and carried out many campaigns; the media and politicians know of us. But after a while I realised that a campaign was needed that would take into consideration all the various issues I have been campaigning for. I went into the centre of society and said: I am not a Muslim. I called on those who wanted to provocatively show their opposition to Islam and the German government's policies to say 'I have turned away from religion' with their photographs. In 1971 there was a campaign of pro abortion rights where women who had had abortions came forward with their pictures and said: I have had an abortion. There are now 300 of us with our photos saying: we have turned away from religion. The news of our coming together exploded in German society. At our press conference, 110 media outlet representatives attended, including Reuters, BBC, CNN and others. At the press conference we said that we are representing another policy. We are against the division of the world into Islamic and non-Islamic countries. We are against the

label that all those who have left Islam-stricken countries are Muslim or that being Muslim is their most important characteristic. At the press conference, I said they have put so many labels on us; I in turn would like to put a label on Islamic organisations – out of date.

Today I have come to say our campaign has received unprecedented support from innumerable people. I receive 250-300 letters daily – most of which congratulate me and calling me brave. 3% say they will kill me with god's poison. 3 hours after my picture and interview was published *In Focus* where I said I was born into a Muslim family by accident and that I was 14 when I turned away from Islam, the German police were at the door of my home saying I had to be protected because the Islamists had threatened to kill me. The political Islamic movement is an international movement and assassination is one of the important means they use.

People ask me if I am not afraid to speak out against the Islamists. I say I know this movement very well. We have brought the leaders of this movement in Iran to their knees. 28 years ago I was given an execution sentence by Khomeini and the Islamic regime's leaders. But today I say if we stay silent, they will stone women in the streets of Germany and England in a few years.

Governments compromise with Islamic groups – the

German, British and European governments. They organise conferences with terrorist organisations about how to integrate people like us in society. When they label us as Muslims and put us all in one sack, they make the leaders of Islamic organisations our leaders and leave it up to them to 'integrate us'.

In politics in Europe you hear only two versions of the veil – either that of the politicians or the Islamic groups. We have risen up and now want to do something so that Maryam Namazie is heard instead. This is another politics. We are for the universality of human rights. We say that religious affiliation is not the main identification of anyone in this century. All have the right to be free, prosperous, love and be loved in the 21 century. We will not allow governments, hand in hand with Islamists, to violate the rights of the children, women and men who have fled Islam-stricken countries.

We represent a new renaissance in Europe. We defend secularism. We defend freedom of expression and speech. In Germany, they cancel a theatre because of its criticism of Islam. In these two weeks I have seen that the vast support we have received is an international movement. Hand in hand with people across the world, we are saying stop. Enough is enough.

Against political Islam,

against the policies of tolerance and multiculturalism of Western governments, against the attempts to portray political Islam and its inhuman policies as people's culture. We defend the universality of human rights. I hope that this type of organisation is begun in various countries and that this becomes international in order to push political Islam back.

To see Mina's speech, go to: [video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=1062474811093542856](http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=1062474811093542856)

*Mina Ahadi is founder of Central Council of Ex-Muslims and Political Bureau member of the Worker-communist Party of Iran. The above is her speech at a March 8 seminar on Women's Rights, the Veil and Islamic and religious laws in London. Other speakers were Sonja Eggerickx: President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union; Ann Harrison: Researcher, Middle East and North Africa Department of Amnesty International's International Secretariat; Maryam Namazie: Director of the Worker-communist Party of Iran's International Relations Committee, 2005 National Secular Society's Secularist of the Year Award Winner and producer of International TV; and Taslima Nasrin: Physician, writer, radical feminist, human rights activist and secular humanist.*



## Maryam Namazie

*Bahar a young woman living in Germany wrote: When you see me on the street I am veiled but do not think I am a Muslim. I have been forced to veil by my father and brothers; they will kill me if I don't. Before I felt alone, but now I know I am not. This is a message she sent to Mina Ahadi, founder of the central council of ex-Muslims in Germany.*

Of course, Bahar is not alone. There are innumerable women and girls in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa to right here in the heart of Europe who know from personal experience what it means to be female under Islam – hidden from view, bound, gagged, mutilated, murdered, without rights, and threatened and intimidated day in and day out for transgressing Islamic mores.

The veil, more than anything else, symbolises this bleak reality.

In my opinion, it is therefore impossible to address the status of women under Islamic laws and defend women's rights without addressing and denouncing the veil.

And this is why the veil is the first thing that Islamists impose when they have any

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access to power.

And also why improper veiling, its removal and its burning at demonstrations and gatherings - as often seen in Iran for example - or its removal when one leaves the home - in places where it is not the law of the land but that of self-appointed imams and family members - has become a symbol of resistance.

I know our opponents often argue that there are many more pressing matters with regards to women's status. Why all the fuss they ask?

To me, it is like asking what all the fuss was about racial apartheid – or segregation of the races – in apartheid South Africa. After all there were so many pressing issues faced by Blacks in that country. I suppose that is why the then South African government kept asserting that separate does not mean unequal (which incidentally is an argument Islamists make all the time). We know otherwise.

And we know – at least in hindsight - why the physical act of segregation was crucial and symbolic of what it meant to be Black under apartheid.

Similarly, the veil is a symbol of sexual apartheid and the segregation of the sexes. In countries where Islam rules, like in Iran, the separate entrances for women in certain government offices; separate areas for women's seating on buses for example;

the banning of women from certain public arenas like sport stadiums; a curtain dividing the Caspian sea for segregated swimming and so on is what it means in practice to be a female under Islam. That people transgress these rules daily is a testimony to their humanity and not the laws or state that imposes it by force.

When we talk about the situation in Iran, some of these apologists will concede that compulsory veiling must be opposed (though I have yet to hear them oppose it other than in their argument's in defence of the veil) but if it is a choice freely made than one must defend the 'right' to veil.

I wholeheartedly disagree. Adult women may have the 'right' to veil though that right is in no way absolute as many rights aren't and a completely different matter for children – which I will come to later. But having the right to do something is very different from defending the 'freely chosen' veil or the 'right to veil'. There may be women who 'freely choose' to genitally mutilate their daughters or immolate themselves on their husband's funeral pyre but that does not mean that we must then defend the right of women to do so or defend the practice of Suttee or FGM. The defence of rights is not about making everyone agree as you will always find people who will defend and commit the indefensible – and that is what religion is in my

opinion. It is about protecting human beings sometimes even from themselves.

The usage of the term choice in this context is extremely deceptive. First off in many places like Iran it is the law of the land. You are fined, arrested, beaten, imprisoned and even killed for transgressing the veil and Islamic mores.

In others where it is not the law, it is effectively so because of pressure and intimidation from the parasitical self-appointed so-called community and Islamic leaders, and family members.

One example of this is the joint statement about the veil from 'Muslim groups, scholars and leaders' in Britain which has stated that the veil 'is not open to debate'. The statement goes so far as to 'advise all Muslims to exercise extreme caution in this issue since denying any part of Islam may lead to disbelief' and to urge them to 'keep this debate within the realm of scholarly discussion amongst the people of knowledge and authority in the Muslim community.'

A recent Channel 4 Dispatches programme recorded a mullah in Green Lane mosque in Birmingham saying 'Allah has created the woman deficient' and a satellite broadcast from the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh, beamed into the mosque suggesting that children should be hit if they don't

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pray and if they don't wear the hijab.

You've also all heard Australia's senior Islamic cleric, Sheik Taj Aldin al-Hilali comparing unveiled women to 'uncovered meat' implying that they invite rape and sexual assault. 'If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside ... without cover, and the cats come to eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats' or the uncovered meat's? The uncovered meat is the problem. If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred.'

Whilst misogynist sermons are the norm in mosques across the world, and across religions, these are a few examples of how a climate of intimidation and fear makes many a woman 'choose' the veil even in places where veiling is not compulsory.

Remove these, and I would even go so far as to say, that there will be few who will 'choose' to live in a mobile prison—other than those who want to show their allegiance to the rising political Islamic movement.

Also, a 'woman's right to choose' must be preceded at the very least by legal and social sexual equality. This is not the case for most. So if you consider the veil on a social scale, it represents neither a right nor a choice and it is a lie to say otherwise.

Of course, women wearing mini-skirts and Jimmy Choos

may be under pressure from the fashion industry's impossible ideals – as we often hear argued in defence of the veil - but it is as ridiculous to compare mini-skirts with the veil, as it is to compare Jimmy Choos with foot binding, which aims at preventing women from 'wandering'.

The veil is not a piece of cloth or clothing, though it is often compared to miniskirts or other 'lewd' forms of clothing the rest of us unveiled women seem to wear. Just as the straight jacket or body bag are not pieces of clothing. Just as the chastity belt was not a piece of clothing. Just as the Star of David pinned on Jews during the holocaust was not just a bit of cloth.

This of course does not mean that only women under Islam or veiled women are oppressed. But it is important to oppose the veil in its own right.

And this has nothing to do with being hate-filled or promoting an attack on Muslims or veiled women though Islamists portray it as such. Interesting coming from a reactionary right wing movement that has turned murder and mayhem into an art form, but as I have said before, opposing FGM does not mean you are attacking those who are mutilated; opposing foot binding or Suttee likewise. In fact, it is an essential to a principled defence of women's rights.

And this is why the chador, burqa and neqab must be

banned—to defend women's rights. Not because they affects interaction, communication and so on. These are side effects. And certainly not because they may make people like Jack Straw uncomfortable. It has to be banned because sexual apartheid is as unacceptable as racial apartheid. Because it is unacceptable for women to be segregated in the 21 century; and for women to walk around in a mobile prison or body bag because religion deems that they be kept invisible.

Any mention of a ban, though, quickly raises cries of authoritarianism. As an aside, it is interesting how much religion can get away with and that its decree for example that women be veiled is not considered authoritarian. But more importantly, a ban is not necessarily bad. Society bans many things in order to safeguard and protect the people living in it, often due to left and progressive social movements demanding it. For example, child labour is banned, so is FGM, child pornography, rape and so on. A ban in such situations is a good thing; it helps to stop abuses from taking place. The argument that banning will only increase the burqa or neqab is ridiculous when used in other examples pertaining to defending people's rights but is somehow considered proper discourse when it comes to the veil.

Also calling for a ban does not necessarily mean you want to or will criminalise a

segment of the population. For example, there is a rule to wear a helmet when driving a motorbike but I don't think there are hundreds of Sikhs languishing in British jails for not doing so. Or for that matter people who smoke in non-smoking areas, and size zero models...

Islamists and their apologists demand that we respect people's religious expressions and beliefs. As I have said many a time, we are duty bound to respect human beings but not every belief or religious expression. Having the right to a belief and religion is not the same as it being a no go area to do as it pleases free of any criticism or condemnation.

Also they say that it is racist to criticise Islam, the veil and political Islam. What rubbish. You cannot be racist against an idea or belief or ideology or its expression. Racism is distinctions, exclusions, restrictions or preferences based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin (albeit constructed) of individuals - of human beings - not their beliefs. Saying it is so is just another attempt at silencing all opposition and criticism.

A ban on the burqa, chador, neqab and its likes is important but it is no where enough. The hijab or any conspicuous religious symbol must be banned from the state and education and relegated to the private sphere. This helps to ensure that government offices and

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the Communist Party of Iran, these debates came to an end. The question that came up after the formation of the party was the relation between communism and the class or 'party and class'. It was natural that with the formation of the party, the party's relation with its subject of organisation in society, namely, the working class, should emerge and our discussion be focused on the relation between party and class. These debates began in earnest, in a written form, with the discussion on style of work at the UCM's First Congress, held in Kurdistan, continuing up until the discussion of 'worker-communism'.

With worker-communism, the debate went beyond an organisational-practical relation with the class. This coincided with the start of the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a period which the bourgeoisie called the 'end of communism'. In seeking the roots of our movement and its differentiation from the communism whose death they were pronouncing, our attention focused more fundamentally on the relation between communism and the working class: the relation between theory and the class, between party-building and the class, between the Soviet question and the class, between the earlier defeats and communism's separation from the class; on the relation between party and class - this time in the sense of the unity that the party must forge with the class, i.e. the union

of the class with the party, the place of worker in the party, the working-class character of socialism itself and even the working-class character of Marxist theory; viewing the history of contemporary communism and socialism from the perspective of class struggle and the class attachment of the tendencies laying claim to communism. These were the components of the discussion of worker-communism.

I don't know how many of you were in that first seminar of worker-communism (ten years ago). There, one of my main arguments was that the category 'worker' enters Marxism's core - embedded in Marx's exploitation theory - not as an object to work on, but as a social phenomenon; the entity 'worker' as a social phenomenon. Marx does not first explain society without classes so as to then bring in classes as contending warriors. Class is already in Marx's theory of exploitation, in his theory of change, in his epistemology. This was a time when we clearly defined our communism, following the *Communist Manifesto*, as proletarian communism, or worker-communism. In a sense, the process of our intellectual separation from the legacy and history of bourgeois socialism in theory, in social vision, in programme, in the way we look at communism's history and in our elaboration of the practical tasks of a communist party is completed with the discussion of worker-communism. We are

then just at the starting point for building an interventionist political party with a worker-communist outlook; something we set about doing by building the Worker-communist Party.

In each period, focusing on those specific discussions made us stronger. Every time, those key questions and the answers they called for took us onto a higher plane and to a stronger political practice. This was because those questions were correct and objective, and our paying attention to them was, if not enough, at least correct in its orientation. Today, in the continuation of those discussions and the process of development of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, which is the result of each of those discussions and self-clarifications, new questions are coming our way which we must respond to in the same way as before; with the same vigour and seriousness as before. And those responses should inform our political practice. In my opinion, the discussions 'party and society' and 'party and political power' are discussions which attempt to recognise, and remove, the barriers to the Worker-communist Party's becoming a fully-fledged political party.

### Party, party-building and political power

This was a main topic on the agenda of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress. What makes an organisation a political party and distinguishes it from pressure groups, intellectual circles,

ideological sects, literary and publishing societies and networks is first and foremost its relation to political power - whether as a concept in its thinking or as a reality in its life and practice. By political power I don't only mean state power - conquest of state power. That does not take place everyday. I mean the ability of an organisation to mobilise forces and influence the power relations in a society; its ability to become a formidable force in the resolution of the political fate of society.

When we complain about the absence of a working-class party in a society, we don't necessarily mean that there aren't any communist groups, magazines and radios, any workers' socialist circles and networks connected with left and communist organisations. We mean, rather, that the working class lacks a party that represents and organises it, sets its power in motion and leads it in the political arena nationally, in the battle over power. In my view, an organisation's relation to political power is an indication of whether that organisation has a party character or not. A party is not merely a political and intellectual organisation or group that quantitatively has reached a certain point of growth. Party is an organisation that has stepped into the battle for power; entered the political field on a social scale. An organisation which exists outside the domain of general politics, outside the real battle over power, over deciding who holds power in society;

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an organisation which, whether by its own conscious decision or due to its quantitative and qualitative characteristics, stands outside this struggle is not a political party.

The day after the February 1979 [Revolution], a huge force gathered around the Fedâyi organisation. For a political party this force is an instrument of intervention in the fate of [political] power during a particular period. It either succeeds in this work and establishes a new balance of power, or loses this power for a time. But despite its vast influence after the revolution, the Fedâyi lacked the profile and features of a political party. It was, in the final analysis, a pressure group in relation to the nationalist movement and the main nationalist parties. It did not have vision, nor the structures, behaviour and aims of a political party. The various factions within the Fedâyi and their cousins in Rah-e Kargar and similar groups are the same today: pressure groups *vis-à-vis* the more mainstream political parties in society.

The isolation of communist organisations in the social battle over power is now a general assumption, to the extent that if it was otherwise, it would raise eyebrows. For many, especially, and above all, for the leaders and activists of these organisations themselves, communism is not a force vying for power, but, rather, the sect of oracles who keep the fire of the temple of class

truths and human ideals aflame for posterity; crimson-attired, humble servants of the Shrine of History; permanent victims of reaction; eternal political prisoners; harbingers of truths for the masses, who apparently have always chosen other ways and other leaders.

This is not the Marxist, worker-communist, idea of party building. Our duty is to create a worker-communist political party. During these 20 years, we have published Marxist papers, championed communist ideals and programmes, built large and small organisations, agitated for communism and fought open, clandestine and armed struggles. Our duty, however, is to build a political party, which in the heart of the social battle for power raises the banner of the worker, the banner of equality and freedom and which objectively is one side of this political battle, with a chance of victory. Communism is about change, and changing bourgeois society requires that the working class is victorious in the battle for power. Worker-communism must turn into a political party in society. This basic and obvious idea of the Communist Manifesto, just like all the ideas of the Manifesto and Marx's entire critical vision, must be pulled out of the rubble of distortions; distorted accounts that have postponed communist revolution and socialist society to a distant future, to another world, denied its urgency, desirability and

possibility for today, and which in various ways have declared worker-communist party-building, i.e. the rise of worker-communism as a political party contending for power, as redundant, impossible and undesirable.

But what makes our communist activity meaningful is precisely this building of a worker-communist party, which raises itself across the whole society in the battle for political power. A party which a worker and any advocate of freedom and equality can join and be sure that through it they can really and practically influence their society, their surroundings and the destiny of the people of their times.

If one thing is to express the common essence of the various stages of our activities in these twenty years, that essence is the effort to build a worker-communism which brings the working class to the arena and represents it not in the margins of society but in the midst of politics in society, in the context of the struggle for power.

### Social mechanisms of power

Concern with political power is in the first place a social idea. The struggle over political power is not a communist invention. Society has mechanisms by which power changes hands. Propaganda, agitation and mobilisation are not Marxist inventions; violence, insurrection, revolt, suppression of revolt and war

are not inventions of the socialist movement. The state, overthrow of states and revolution - none of these is a communist invention. These are social phenomena and social mechanisms.

A society's objective features, and not our preconceived plans, our ways and preferences, tell communists how, when, in what circumstances and in what periods to take power. We are not inventors of new political catapults for the conquest of history's pinnacles. If we are concerned about taking power, then the first question is: what are the social mechanisms for taking power, of becoming powerful and winning in the political domain in present-day society? This is a very concrete question. Let's ask ourselves: how can we speak to a large number of people in this world? How can we unite and organise a large number of people? How can we build a movement which influences people's thinking on a vast scale? How can we fight the ruling ideas? How are these ideas made and made credible to people in today's world? What are their mechanisms and how can we combat them? How can we become a force in a world with such economic, political, military, informational, cultural and educational features to be able to influence, mobilise and lead in the right direction the lives and actions of millions of members of the working class, the large mass of people who are yearning for freedom and equality?

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If a worker-communist political party wants to bring about some change in this world, it must be strong; it must *become* strong; so strong as to defeat the bourgeoisie today in its own world. It was Marx who a long time ago said that to change a thing, even to destroy it, you have to know how it works; you have to know its laws of motion. It is not we who decide how we can become a powerful political force in the world today. Society itself, according to its characteristics, defines the mechanisms of its transformation too. We have to learn these mechanisms; mechanisms which allow us - the worker-communist movement and party - to grow, become influential, gather forces, mobilise them for revolution, to wrest power and implement our programme.

By society's own mechanisms I don't mean its legal mechanisms. Insurrection and revolution are contemporary society's mechanisms of change. So are revolts, uprisings and wars. But serving poisoned food and drink to opponents at dinner feasts is not an appropriate method in present-day society, whilst some Abbasid sovereign could use it frequently. In the Sarbedaran Dynasty (by which, of course, I don't mean [Sarbedaran] the Association of Iranian Communists) one of the Sultans had come to power after killing the king with his cleaver during an audience with him. But this is not an

option today.

We are entering a period in the life of the party that the question of political influence in society, being present in the battle for power and seizing the levers of power in society, are seriously coming on our agenda. Taking hold of these levers and stepping into these domains is, by virtue of contemporary society's characteristics, unavoidable for a force which is trying to change society. We have already touched these levers a little, but it seems that we are surprised and even worried by our power; we get frightened of our successes, run back home and hide behind our mother. Some feel alien to this political movement and expression. A communism that agitates in neighbourhoods and circles, a communism that attends organisational rendezvous and small secret meetings is familiar to them, but they are unaccustomed to a communism that plants its banner in the city centre, a communism that is so visible to all and recognised by all that a worker on whose street the party does not have any presence is also able to get up and join these communists. But outside this window, the struggle over political power goes on every day, continuously taking on new forms and channels. Our intervention on the issue of political power requires that we go for the social mechanisms of power in contemporary society. Knowing, and, more importantly, applying these methods is certainly not easy, but recognising methods

which definitely are unsuitable for a worker-communist party in our age is not that difficult.

### “Classical communist tradition” or legacy of repression and isolation

A communist party which is unable to apply such social methods will fail to capture power. Moreover, it would be the least ready and least equipped of all the forces for seizing these levers. What has happened to communism is that the bourgeoisie by the defeats, repression and pressures that it has continuously inflicted on communists has succeeded in turning communism - i.e. a force contending for political power, which 150 years ago was striving to seize power using these same mechanisms - into a marginal quasi-religious sect; a cult which defines its political life in a corner of society, finds its identity there and basically doesn't want to leave the spot - just like micro-organisms which adapt themselves to, and survive in, the cold in an ice age, so that even when the weather has warmed and the ice age is over, they do not return to the sun and warmth; they get used to the ice and can only live in those conditions. The external compulsion that one day forced that micro-organism to adapt to the unfavourable conditions for the sake of survival, now, after several cycles, turns into the innate life style of that organism; into part of its existence, tradition and identity; any other life becomes inconceivable. We communists have lived under

repression. We have been told: you can't come out, freely and openly go on a footstool and speak to people. We have been told, you may whisper to your comrade in a corner, in some alleyway, secretly and quietly, where you are not overheard. You have to live and speak in that corner and say whatever you want and in whatever language you want; take as long as you like; it is your sect; you may say whatever you want in the language of your sect; but you are not allowed to open your mouths in front of people and society. In this margin we, and those like us, learn to convert the communist party from an instrument of struggle into a corridor where we set camp and live, a repository to be in and to exist in; a tradition to live in. This tradition has its own symbols, goddesses, angels, icons and rituals; its own history, fairytales, language and vocabulary. It goes so far that it seems that for its members communism is not an instrument of struggle, but a faith invented by a group of people condemned to life in the margins of society, through massive repression and propaganda by the bourgeoisie, so as to retain their self-esteem, to make their life meaningful and to convince themselves that they are engaged in the act of changing the world. To these kinds of communists, once they step outside that tradition, society is an unfamiliar terrain. They find themselves clumsy, ineffective and easily deceived. As soon as they say they want to make a revolution, some guy who has

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had nothing to do with Marxism before, some right-wing lecturer of the University of London or a postgraduate student of Tehran Polytechnic or the devout son of a Bazaar merchant, who is now a student in France, suddenly rushes up to him to say: 'Hey, this is contrary to Marxism! Are the objective and subjective conditions of your revolution ready?!' Bewildered, our communist wonders if that's the case; is it really contrary to Marxism?! He then returns to his shell. He goes back to his sect to debate about the objective and subjective conditions of workers' revolution and the prerequisites for the historical turn of socialism in the year 3000! As soon as a communist sets foot into the field of political power, 50 social prefects show up to tell her, 'Hey, it won't do; you are theoretical, you have tradition, you believe in historical laws, you have Marx; where is your class?' They remind us that we are of a different make; that we should not dirty our hands with the question of power. When we mention the word political power, they scream, 'Oh, despots and totalitarians have arrived!' Never mind that the prisons and the courts belong to them, that it is they who tie up and flog people, that it is they who have set up the concentration camps and launched the wars. Everyday they throw tons of scum, threats and bullets at us so we would stay in the same corner, keep quiet and not think of intervening in society; not think of the social

mechanisms of intervening in society and of changing society; so we would go and live our lives in our 'Left world'. And comrades, at least since Bolshevism till now, the major part of the radical Left and communist groups has lived in these corridors, in the margins of society.

A large part of the methods and norms which we think are the realities and inherent features of our movement are in fact imposed and 'internalised' results of external pressures which over many years have been exerted on us and which do not belong to us at all. Our language is not an awkward, pompous language, although we must be smart and informed and able to follow the most complex theoretical issues. Our language is the language with which the people of today speak about their problems. Our concerns are not the concerns of our sect. They are the concerns of the human being today, even if we need to attend to ourselves too so as to have a strong rank. Our concern is not the repackaging of what our forbearers have said, but, rather, responding to the problems of contemporary society. I am for the strongest Marxism that there is. I think the strongest Marxism is a Marxism that is able to influence the external world. The essence of what Marx said was that society is the basis. It is society that shapes our spirits, thoughts, emotions, intellect, aesthetics and everything else. Yet precisely those people for whom society is supposed to

have the most crucial place in their thinking have turned out to be the most indifferent people towards the laws of motion and mechanisms of society. When we were discussing the issue of "communist agitators and workers' circles", we were making precisely this point. We were saying, let's see what is the minimal mechanism that society itself has created for the unification of workers; let's link ourselves with that and work with that. Let's say what we have to say *there*. There you will find people who are all ears. The discussion of "workers' circles" was about recognising part of society's real mechanisms. It was a reminder that the working class is a social and socially-developed entity. It is not as if in the absence of Left groups, workers are isolated individuals, gazing at the sky, motionless and baffled, waiting for someone to come up and tell them that poverty is bad and unity is good. We said be sure that at any moment in time there are resistance circles among workers. We said that the condition of intervening in the fate of society is to recognise society's mechanisms and laws of motion. This is the basis of Marxism.

Isolation from society, the inability to take hold of society's mechanisms so as to shift forces and to make political assertion, absence from the battle over power, indifference towards society's ongoing issues and settling into a craft-based, sect-like and marginal existence – these are not classical communist working

traditions, but, rather, the legacy of repression, suppression and defeat. We should not accept the image that is portrayed of the political life and "classical" method of communist activity. First of all, this so-called "classical" was something else 20 years ago. Secondly, we ourselves have played a big role in altering this "classical". So I don't appreciate the claim that this is not classical communist work. It is we who define what communist work is. And if we realise, to the best of our understanding and according to our political needs and social ideals, that we should go in a particular direction, we should go and not be worried that nobody else has taken this route before and that it is bumpy and un-trodden.

### Political activity is by nature a public activity

Let me pause over some general results of these preliminaries. The first point is that struggle for political power is a public struggle. People are normally public and it is people and social classes that struggle over power; they try to take it and not lose it. Political struggle in society, as a struggle between people in society, has public mechanisms. It involves speaking, writing, shouting, calling out, drawing attention, gathering forces, moving forces about, resisting, building up barricades, and so on. Clandestine political struggle is something that has been imposed, and is being imposed, on our movement. We have got used to this

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imposed reality. We do not know the methods of activity when we are not under repression; as if we must necessarily work under repression and clandestinely. True, a communist party must be able to work clandestinely too, and some communist activity is always secret. But we must be aware that our aim is to break down this barrier of repression that is stopping us from using the social mechanisms for speaking out, attracting forces and fighting on a social scale. We are trying to break down this barrier to be able to work under open circumstances and free of repression, and the bourgeoisie is not letting us. We used to say that the task of the 1979 revolution was to create the democratic pre-requisites for a workers' revolution. But if those conditions could be created, would we be able to properly take advantage of them? Can a radical Left that is inherently a pressure group and not a political party geared to society and power get involved in determining society's destiny even under democratic conditions? I don't think so.

My first conclusion is that political work must be conducted openly, on a vast scale and for everyone to see. We must set foot into this field. The method of activity traditionally used by the Left, i.e. a clandestine method, a method where statements, slogans and demands are thrown at people from behind a wall as evident precepts; like a mind, a spring of wisdom and

knowledge hidden somewhere, unknown to people, declaring "we know history is heading this way and not that way" is not at all a constructive and communist method. This is not the method of serious political forces. After all, if you want people to come with you, you have to show yourselves to them. You can't do this without a political name, identity and image. Those who appreciate that to mobilise two million people, you need 10,000 real people with known identities and faces, with influence and respect among people, will also understand that a party that has introduced 50 communist figures to society and thinks that this is not enough has not denied Lenin's theory of party and has not turned into a "personalities' party". Rather, it is simply saying that we have too few figures. To have personalities, real faces, known leaders and activists is the normal and actual way of life of political parties that want to become powerful.

In political struggle the individual is important. The individual is what gives a face to trade unions, political parties and movements; it makes them tangible for and accessible to people. When you look at an organisation, you look at not only its functions, role, programme and *raison d'être*, but also at the people who make it up. This is crucial in making the relation of society with that organisation concrete and real. Any person, however

much part of an organisation and a collective body, plays an individual role and has a particular share in the political struggle. An organisation or movement that disregards and leaves out the individual makes itself ineffectual and neutral. Organisation is an indication of a deep relationship amongst individuals. In the end, an organisation has no meaning beyond the unity of its members. I understand that in the history of a party individuals come and go, but the significance of an organisation lies in the fact that in each period it has brought consensus to certain individuals and united them. Organisation is a network that links, strengthens and co-ordinates these individuals and their struggles. It puts the power of the organisation behind the individual and makes the force of all the individuals into the power of the organisation. But the organisation does not replace the struggle of the individual.

This discussion is not new among us, of course. We discussed at length the concept of communist agitators and practical leaders of the workers' movement and the role of renowned and trusted individuals and leaders in the workers' movement 15 years ago. In this sense, Marx's communism, worker-communism, is always a "party of personalities". Dissolving the individual identity of communists in a faceless administrative and military organisation, to the point of converting their names to initials, stripping communists of identity and

turning publicity, agitation, slogan and calls into products of secretariats and central administrative bodies of clandestine organisations are not products of our movement. They do not represent our movement. The question is not about the party not having committees, not having a strong underground foundation that is able to function under all circumstances; the fact is that this very underground network of ours has allowed us to be here today; our firm discipline has backed up our work. None of this is in question. But have we taken the field out of the hands of others enough for us to start to doubt if we are not going too far in this direction?

We must go in this direction hundreds of times more. We should have many more public faces even with our present scale of activity so that when somebody in Iran thinks about this party taking power, they can clearly picture what type of people, with what kind of beliefs, manners and characters will come to power; so that they are able to want and wish that such people come to power. We have not even properly stepped on this road. Is this kind of work not socialist? In the old and esoteric sense of the word, in the twisted conception of those who want to live in the marginal corridors of society, this is not socialist. For a Marxist, however, this is socialism par excellence; for someone who wrests power out of the hands of the bourgeoisie, this is precisely socialism. We have derived this necessity precisely from

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our communism and Marxism and believe that this is the condition of going forward in the battle for our goals. If we are to do away with private property and the wage-labour system and establish the historic goals and demands that we have declared, then we must emerge before society as a large number of real people, with our political images and faces and issue our call to society and the whole working class. Being locked up in the closet, being faceless and existing on the margins are not marks of communism. These are what the bourgeoisie wants so as to suppress communists. They have erected a machinery of repression, an enormous apparatus of lies so as to impose precisely this onto communism and the working-class rank. For Marxists appearing as real people is indeed socialism; it is a duty of socialism; it is the starting point of socialism. Anything else is not socialism.

### Party and class: local relations and social relations

What happens to the work of the party with workers? Direct and personal work of the party with labour activists and networks is, of course, a permanent part of the work of a communist party, which we should always be doing. This is the kind of activity among workers, which we have both talked a lot about and which is the presupposition for our daily work, and for which we have built an organisation. Another

kind of work with workers is that you create the possibility for workers to choose communism; to say to workers: you see this battle? In this battle you can choose communism. Worker-communism is an objective and existing force. It is not any more a fight between the National Front, the Tudeh Party, the Monarchy and Islam. This is the Worker-communist Party and you can choose it. Your choice is not limited to the parties of the ruling class. This is your party; tomorrow you can go to downtown Tehran, to the party's head office, join it and get hooked up and united with other workers in your neighbourhood, factory and city who are also members. And you can accept some duties from the same day.

Comrades, we want to give workers the right to choose communism. If we are holed up, why should they choose us? For years Trotskyists have been taking soup to picket lines and getting beaten up by the police alongside workers. But they still see that when workers think about power and the state, they still think about Social Democracy, for the Trotskyist party has not put itself in a position making it worthy of selection as an instrument of intervention in political power by workers. A party must be on the political centre stage so that one may choose it; so that one can see that it is capable of something, knows its way around and can move forces about.

Our party must be able to

show up on such a scale that the Iranian worker is able to choose it. I don't mean in elections. I mean workers as a class choosing the party and saying that from among the existing options we are going with this party. One permanent and indivisible aspect of our work is to activate our worker relationships. Another is to make the party, as a real instrument, accessible to the working class across society in the struggle over power, which it can use as its party in radically determining the fate of society. If we don't do this second one, we have failed in our communist duty. What has the working class done that it should for ever find socialism in the shape of ten-strong groups such as "United Struggle in Defence of the Rights of Deprived Workers" and to find on the political centre-stage the parties of the propertied classes busy playing with their destiny. We have to put an end to this. And this calls for communists who have put aside the tradition of marginal existence and sect-building and the culture of being a pressure group, and who show up in the middle of the battle for power.

The words communism and socialism are in themselves and without any explanation very potent for workers. In a social struggle, workers instinctively and naturally would find socialists. This is a tradition of the working class. Socialism is a product of the working class. This is a movement that has given communism to the world. Anywhere in the world, from Argentina to Korea,

wherever workers get together, you can already guess that Marxist literature gets passed round and read among them. We have to build a worker-communist party that is present and is seen in society, on the scene of the battle of classes over the fate of society, and not merely as a name at the bottom of the organisation's leaflets in some circle. This is the challenge facing us today. As a workers' party, a party that has been built in decisive battles over Marxism and the differentiation of worker-communism from bourgeois communism, the Worker-communist Party has arrived at a point today that the only way it can forward is to understand the relation of party and society and the concept of social mechanism of taking power. What I mean by taking power is not the final day of attacking the Winter Palace and forming a state. I mean the party becoming powerful and gaining influence in society, such that it is an important player in the battle of classes over power; so that they would not be able to impose something on society over the head of the party. This has now begun and we see the blossoming of this process and you can see how it is progressing at an accelerated pace.

Comrades, victory over the bourgeoisie must be done on its own ground. We will not triumph over anyone at our congress; we will not win political power in our camps. Therefore we have to go to their ground, and that's what we are doing. We have to prepare ourselves for this

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role. Wherever we have come from, whether we are political agitators, labour leaders, partisans, poets or writers, we have reached a point where we need to take on roles on the scale of society; to stand up and speak to the whole of society, as personalities of the socialist and worker-communist movement.

### Marxist party – social party

We are a Marxist party, and in this process of growth, like everything else with a wide appeal, our core must be highly compact and dense. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress I said that historically whenever Left parties have wanted to become social forces and to assert themselves on a social scale, they have turned to the right. And they have justified this shift to the right by claiming that society is even further to the right, so if they want votes, they have to make a turn to the right. And, of course, historically they have failed in this. Some representative of a radical Left party may get into parliament for a spell, but in the next round he or she will be sent home packing. We are among the few communist organisations since the Bolsheviks who want to become mass parties on the basis of our radicalism and maximalism; indeed to turn maximalism and communism, our communist goals and the idea of communist revolution into a mass and social force; our last word on religion into society's discourse. We

believe we must turn this undiluted communism into a mass and social force.

This perspective faces us with two questions: first, is this really possible? To which my answer is that experience has shown that in our time in fact it is this way that works. The present society needs radical answers and radical people; people who speak out the fundamentals of their views and want to unite their co-thinkers to realise the entirety of this radical perspective. It is enough for 5% of society to think like us for us to take power; for 5% of the people in Iran to actively support the Worker-communist Party and think of it as their party for us to take over the whole region. Never mind if the official, legal press in Iran does not look upon us favourably. 60% of the people in that country are anti-religious and anti-god, who have reached the end of their tethers under the Islamic regime, and all of who are our potential supporters. Whoever has had enough of Islam, has us; whoever has had enough of women's inequality, has us; whoever has had enough of this regime's and its opposition's 'orientalism' [hostility with whatever is western – translator's note], has us. And it is our right that they should have us. By regarding us as their representatives, these classes have not distorted our working-class and communist identity. There are people who say 'we are with you because you say what the youth feel and what

women feel; because you speak of a more modern culture; or because you are standing up to religion'. There is nothing wrong with that. People who come with us come for the part we are playing in society in that particular time; and if we don't play that part, they won't come with us any more; they will go with those who are playing that role. To have these people around us is not demeaning. It was always supposed to be the case that the working class and worker-communism must emerge as the champions of *all* freedom and *all* equality in society.

The second question is, having gathered these forces, these demands and tendencies around us, what is the guarantee that we will not become *their* party? The party of only *those* objectives? Here then we have to emphasise the other side of the coin. The Worker-communist Party of Iran must have a committed communist backbone; and this backbone must be growing all the time. Let me here digress briefly to the discussion of 'member and cadre'. I believe anyone who wishes to join the WPI should be able to do so. My assumption is that all people are decent. Everybody knows why they have joined the party; they must have liked its views and policies. But the party must have a cadre layer that steers it, reproduces it, attends to its problems and develops it; those who have the whole plan in their hands, the whole argument; those who can see to the end of the horizon and who are strongly and fully

committed in theory, ideas and cause. This is one aspect of our tasks that must not be forgotten.

The question is we want 500,000 members, and for that we need 2,000 strong communist cadres, who have been trained up by the party. So one of the duties of every cadre is to pick good party members and work on them, give them literature, discuss with them and train them. In my view, the notion of a large social party is not incompatible with the idea of a Marxist party; we want to prove that it is not. It is possible to be a Marxist, a firebrand, theoretical, to want the entire socialist change, and at the same time have a large social party that grows with the smallest correspondence between its wishes and those of the people. Some may say those who have come with us for the demands of the youth will leave us once they have reached their goals. So be it; until that day we have benefited. The several decades of theoretical and practical history behind this party and the bloody battles it has emerged from show where it stands. We are communists, and this communism is strong enough for us to go forward and gather forces several times over without worrying that we are being polluted with the 'dirty world of politics'. Having this force is vital today.

### Revival of world communism

I talked about our party stepping onto the centre-

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stage of politics; into the heart of society. But there is something else that I think is important. If communism on a world scale has any future, it is through *parties* that do this. It will not be through our Secretariat and Public Relations Office making contact with British, German and Australian activists and asking their views about our positions. This is, of course, a good thing and necessary, but if anything is to revive communism in the world, it is the ability and competence of two or three worker-communist parties in the world who have become a force in several countries of a fair size. This is what will regenerate communism, Marxist theory, the Communist Manifesto and Capital. It is our duty and what we owe to the world communist movement to become powerful. We just need to be in power for a

couple of years in some part of the world; taking power or just throwing reaction out of part of the country will kindle the attention of the people of the world to worker-communism and its victorious party, enabling one to address the whole world about Marx, Lenin, Communist International and what the worker deserves in the world today. We, the parties who are able to become a power in society, will revive communism. This is the only real answer after the fall of the Eastern Bloc. Our answers are not theoretical; we, and those before us, have already given the theoretical answers. Our answers are practical - in the wide sense of the word. Our real response to the task of reviving communism, following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, is to raise the banner of communism somewhere with a large

enough number of people and a loud enough sound so as to draw the world's attention. We are capable of this. I don't honestly know which other parties around the world are doing this. But I can see that on the scale of a country like Iran we are capable of doing it. Our party has the potential to do something positive on such a scale, which can take the communist movement as a whole up to a higher level.

The task before us today is using this 20-year asset, wisdom, experience and the forces that have gathered together and been tempered over these 20 years to do something outside this marginal tradition and history; something socially effective. This is something we have started and are all proud of.

At the same time we are not sufficiently familiar with these territories, not skilled

enough and not aware of their pitfalls. We have to learn quickly and be more vigilant and agile than our rivals; more imaginative. There is a world of work to do and I want us after this seminar to dwell on various aspects of those.

*The above is the first part of the late Mansoor Hekmat's speech at the Worker-communist Party of Iran's Central Committee Plenum in November 1998. Additional explanations of the issues contained in the speech, as well as the subheading 'Party, party-building and political power', have been added to the article. This was a preamble to a longer and more specific discussion on the organisational and stylistic aspects of the party's activities, which is not included here. Translator: Bahram Soroush.*

## What's all the fuss about, page 4

clerks, to doctors and nurses are not promoting their religious beliefs and are instead doing their jobs. In the same way that a teacher can't teach creationism instead of evolution and science in the classroom; a pharmacist can't refuse contraceptive pills to a woman because of her beliefs; a male doctor can't refuse to treat a woman patient or vice versa.

Finally, child veiling must be

banned full stop. This is a children's rights issue. While adults may 'choose' veiling or a religion, children by their very nature cannot make such choices; what they do is really what their parents tell them to do. Again the use of the term choice here is deceptive. Children must be protected even if they 'choose' to stay with abusive parents, to work to support poor families or to stop attending school.

Children have the absolute

right to be children – nothing must be allowed to segregate them or restrict them from accessing information, advances in society and rights, playing, swimming and in general doing things children must do. Whatever their beliefs, parents do not have the right to impose their beliefs, including veiling on children just because they are their own children, just as they can't deny their children medical assistance or beat and neglect them or marry them off at 9 because it's part of their beliefs or religion.

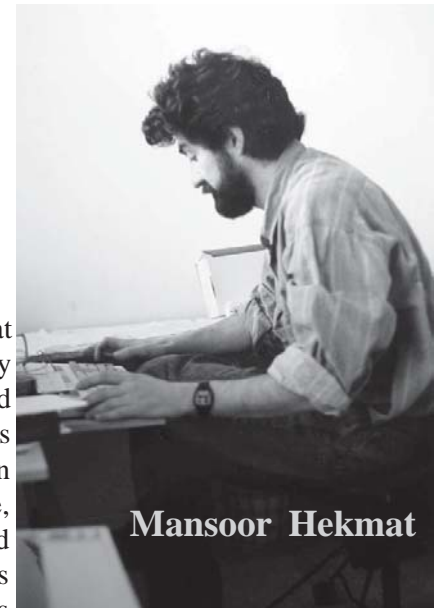
Child veiling is a form of child abuse and has to be stopped.

Throughout history, progress and change have come about not by appeasing, apologizing or excusing reaction, but by standing up to it firmly and unequivocally. This is what has to be against Islam, political Islam and the veil. We have to state loud and clear that sexual apartheid has no place in the 21st century; enough is enough.

*The above is Maryam Namazie's speech at a March 8 seminar in London.*

On his weekly TV programme, Talking with Tatchell, human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell interviews Maryam Namazie on regime change from within. To view, click here: <http://doughty.gdbtv.com/>

# Party and Society: From a pressure group to a political party



Mansoor Hekmat

## A twenty-year route

Comrades! Today - take or leave several weeks - is the twentieth anniversary of the formation of the Unity of Communist Militants (UCM). This is related to my discussion today since I want to explain the path that, at least in my mind, as a socialist, has been travelled during these twenty years since the inception of the UCM, so as to make my discussion more intelligible. But let me here first congratulate comrade Hamid Taqvaei on the twentieth anniversary of the UCM. We two started the Unity of Communist Militants. However, it was very clear to me that if I was not around, Hamid would do the same thing; but that if he was not around, personally, I would not do it. I want to say and stress the fact that my gratitude towards comrade Hamid Taqvaei has no limits [continuous applause from the floor].

During these twenty years, in my view, a path has been travelled – the features and defining moments of which can be politically, theoretically and methodologically explained. This is a route which, I think one should consciously follow, be aware of, and, in particular, always try to identify its next stages; since standing on one spot when objective

circumstances and requirements for the growth of our movement change, makes one fall behind and lose relevance. Every political movement has to go forward with its history, its contemporary history, and sketch a path for itself.

In my view, we once again stand before a new stage on this path, where new expectations and new roles are sought of us. In order to prepare ourselves, as particular individuals with particular backgrounds and characters, to meet these tasks, we need to understand the spirit of the period and adjust ourselves accordingly. If we want to give a name to it, maybe we can say that this is a period in which we are discovering the relation between party and society; a period in which we focus on the relation between the communist party and society, so as to better understand the mechanisms of the interaction of party and society and to base ourselves on this understanding.

In the period immediately before the 1979 revolution, the key question before us – I mean for the circle that Hamid Taqvaei, myself and other comrades had abroad – was the question of ‘communism and Marx’. We were faced with this old question: what does Marxism

really say and to what extent are the really existing so-called communist poles related to Marxism? In our view, the Chinese, Soviet, Albanian and Trotskyist communisms were not Marx’s communism. The first process we went through, which later informed UCM’s character, was our reflections and emphasis on true, revolutionary, Marxism. The distinguishing characteristic of the UCM was its Marxist character; the fact that its members were Marxist.

With the revolution came the question of the relation between ‘communists and the revolution’, or, in other words, the relation between Iranian communists and the Iranian revolution. Our attention was drawn towards such questions: what do social classes do in this revolution? What should we do? Where is the revolutionary force? What is the character of the revolution? What is the state? What are the principles of our attitude towards bourgeois parties? What is the place of the agrarian question? What is our position towards the Provisional Government, the Islamic tendency and its factions? In one word, ‘What is to be done’ in this revolution, as communists? These were the questions we addressed.

In the continuation of these debates, out of the discussion of ‘revolution’, and based on the circumstances and possibilities created by the revolution, came the concept of ‘communist party’; in other words, the question of ‘communism and party’. Our thesis was that the result of this process, i.e. of the efforts of a Marxist organisation like ours in the heart of the revolution, must be the building of a party that deals with the revolution as a working class party, as a communist party, in the real sense of the word. This meant leaving behind the pre-party period.

If you remember, this was a time when discussions centred on questions such as: what is a party? What are its pre-requisites? What is the place of programme in it? What is our criticism of the ‘link theory’ [the theory, prevalent within the Left, that you have to first link with the class before you can build the party – translator’s note], etc.? With the formation of

*continued on page 5*