

Workers' Liberty



The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself

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Solidarity can win freedom for asylum seekers



Inside:

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- Socialist Alliance and trade unions.
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Where we stand

SOCIALISM to us means not the police state of Stalinism, but its polar opposite, the self-organised power of the working class breaking the entrenched power of the billionaires and their bureaucratic state machine.

Socialism means a society restructured according to the working-class principle of solidarity. It means an economy of democratic planning, based on common ownership of the means of production, a high level of technology, education, culture and leisure, economic equality, no material privileges for officials, and accountability. Beyond the work necessary to ensure secure material comfort for all, it means the maximum of individual liberty and autonomy.

The trade unions are the product of long struggles by the working class for the right to build their own organisations to protect them from the arrogant power of the bosses. They remain the major organisations of the working class, the major vehicles of class struggle. There is no short-term prospect of them being replaced by new organisations. Since we believe socialism can be achieved only by the working class liberating itself, we must focus on the trade union movement, rather than on "radical" movements without a working class or socialist perspective.

Yet the unions represent the working class incompletely, unsatisfactorily, binding the class to capitalism. We must develop the unions, transform them, reinvigorate them with socialist purpose. To do that, the radical activist minority must organise itself and equip itself with clear ideas. That is our aim: to spread ideas of unfalsified socialism, to educate ourselves in socialist theory and history, to assist every battle for working-class self-liberation, and to organise socialists into a decisive force, able to revolutionise the labour movement so that it, in turn, can revolutionise society.

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Editorial

A Government for Refugees

We are not protesting against mandatory detention and temporary protection visas for the sake of it. We are campaigning to win very specific changes to government policy, in fact to defeat government policy. Howard has made such a central issue of his refugee policy, that we have to defeat the Coalition in order to change Australian refugee policy.

Labor's policy under Simon Crean is barely any better. However, there are huge cracks emerging in the ALP on refugee policy. This is good! It is a significant achievement that the largest ALP state conferences (Victoria, NSW and Queensland) have voted against mandatory detention and temporary protection visa (TPVs). But even if similar votes are achieved at other State Conferences, it will be extremely difficult to get a similar policy adopted by the ALP National Conference in Tasmania next year, and even harder to enforce such a vote on the parliamentary ALP.

A number of unions are also coming out against mandatory detention, though many of them are not affiliated to the ALP and thus will not have any influence on ALP conferences. One of the largest affiliated unions is the AMWU, whose National Council has come out in support of policy similar to "Labor4Refugees".

The stronger the clamour from within the ALP and affiliated unions becomes, the more the issues of accountability within the ALP will become obvious.

Changing Labor policy on refugees should be one of the aims of the diverse campaigns to support refugees and especially to end mandatory detention and the TPV system.

We keep fighting these policies and any governments that implement them. We also keep going to community groups and trade unions, to the streets, to speak out and involve more people in showing solidarity with refugees. These are all a vital part of mobilising.

The Socialist Alliance also contests elections on a platform of solidarity with refugees. Not only that, the Socialist Alliance is a voice for the struggles and interests of working-class Australians, whose anxieties and fears the Howard Government has so cynically and hypocritically exploited in its fear-mongering campaign. Increased insecurity of employment and the downward pressure on incomes for many low- to middle-income wage earners are not caused by refugees arriving in Australia. Profit-taking capitalist madness is the cause.

A government that stands for workers' interests and takes the side of workers wherever we struggle against the employers will also be a government for all workers without distinction of nationality.

Workers' Liberty supports the efforts of Labor4Refugees to win a change of policy from the Labor Party. And we say vote for Socialist Alliance in the elections to say that working-class

solidarity is the answer to the pressures of capital, and the foundation for international solidarity.

The Socialist Alliance and political representation

What underlies the debate about the trade unions in SA is: what, in fact, is our political project? Workers' Liberty argues that the aim of the Socialist Alliance should be the establishment of a mass-based, left-wing workers' party. A strategic orientation towards this has two main aspects – firstly, transforming the Socialist Alliance and, secondly, relating to other developments in the working class.

Transforming the Socialist Alliance

The Socialist Alliance needs to develop towards being a united and democratic socialist party, with a much fuller, more comprehensive program, campaigning cohesively on many more fronts than election campaigns and propaganda events, and with a regular publication. This cannot be achieved in one big jump — for a united Socialist Alliance revolutionary party NOW! — but has to be worked towards. Among the tasks on this road are: increasing the role for SA in co-ordinating interventions (and discussing tactical differences) in campaigns; increasing the level of political debate and discussion; common activities/clubs on campuses, etc.; building a profile of regular activity in local campaigns; a regular Socialist Alliance paper. These are necessary to attract the many independent leftists who are holding back, waiting to see if SA is more than a sectarian bearpit. It also requires a change in priorities for many of the affiliates. SA is just one among many priorities at the moment and it shows. (This is not a jibe at the International Socialist Organisation or Democratic Socialist Party. Workers' Liberty has great problem in allocating our meagre resources). If the participating groups organised more of their activism through the Socialist Alliance, instead of separately, this could be resolved.

Relating to political developments in the working class.

The biggest developments are: the continuing development of a militant and politically conscious leadership of a group of particular Victorian unions (with varying degrees of limitation). This has the potential to lead to a major split to the left from the ALP. Evidence of this is the AMWU developments, Dean Mighell's shift to the Greens, the TCFUA/AMWU/CFMEU stand on refugees at MayDay etc. Even the right-wing NSW Labor Council is challenging Crean's policy on refugees. Crean's moves to reduce the influence of unions in the ALP are an attempt to show the ruling class that he is not beholden to the working class. And Crean is meeting with resistance, though rarely for effective political reasons. These developments within the Labor movement show a search for new political answers. The Socialist Alliance needs to be there to join in the discussion of what those answers should be, to argue for class struggle and independent working-class politics, and to educate our own members and supporters in working-class politics.

There is explosive growth of support for the Greens. This support is electoral — membership growth and practical support amongst leftists and unionists. There are significant

left forces in the Greens who do bother to relate to the Socialist Alliance and who would welcome, in the future, a formal relationship with unions. (Fraser Brindley, Moreland Greens Councillor, was very good on this at the Melbourne TU seminar). If the Socialist Alliance is going to win voters, supporters and members from the Greens, then we need to clarify our differences. Class struggle, union politics and an analysis of capitalism are the fundamental issues that the Socialist Alliance has to take up with the Greens.

If the Socialist Alliance can successfully carry out the transformation towards being a socialist party that unites the left at a deeper level than elections, it can have a real impact on the developments in the working-class movement. We can increase our credibility in the eyes of militant unionists, community activists and the left of the Greens. The way to do this is for the SA to develop real roots in working-class communities, to make a rich and democratic internal life, and to form a more comprehensive platform which is based on advocating for union, community and environmental struggles. We need to help to create conditions in which the leaders of the left unions will be prepared commit themselves, whether in or out of the Labor Party, to a platform to fight the leaders of the parliamentary Labor Party at all levels. We should also aim to convince the left of the Greens to commit to building an environmentally-conscious workers' party.

The Socialist Alliance and the trade unions

Bryan Sketchley - unaligned member, QPSU
Melissa White - member of *Workers' Liberty*, NTEU

Brisbane, 14 June, 2002

As one of its objectives, the Socialist Alliance strives to politically represent the constituency of the working class. That is why we ran candidates in the last federal election. However, at present there are severe limitations, both political and practical, on SA's ability to represent that class constituency. These will become permanent defects of our organisation unless we change at least two conditions of SA's existence.

First, there are major political defects in the platform, which is as yet indistinguishable in class terms from anything that the Greens presently offer or the ALP of yesterday offered (or still, as a matter of fact, has the *capacity*, in principle, to offer). Whilst it is true that this is a result of the fact that SA is an alliance existing as a federated balance of power of groups with different political views instead of a unified organisation, it is not the whole of the reason for the defective platform. We simply didn't get the best we could have got at last year's founding conference in Melbourne. Our sights were set too low. They were set low for a combination of political-psychological reasons, which are well worth examining in detail, but of which we mention only two here;

- The DSP comrades have become accustomed to scoring low results in elections as a result of their own electoral work, so that even a result of 1% seems like a "victory".
- The ISO comrades have become fearful of "alienating" workers, so that they want to eliminate any half-way reasonable political demand from the platform (note the

debate around the demands to "disarm the police" and "open the borders" at the founding conference, where they sought to have both demands removed).

It would still be possible to secure a platform that is more explicitly for working-class struggle and working-class interests, and which links these to the goal of socialism, even within the current, limited parameters of debate that we all live under. In such a situation, we would like to see the platform better accommodate the short-term demands of the Australian working class against socialist criteria, so that each political demand is linked carefully with the requirements for establishing workers' representation in parliament in this country.

The poverty of the platform is not our main concern here, although we note it well. We will contribute further to that discussion in subsequent submissions. It must be said, however, that what we raise below can not occur without a simultaneous significant development of the SA political platform.

The second, practical, condition that must be met before we in SA can ever succeed in representing the constituency of the working class politically is that we must take up trade union issues immediately, and not in a superficial way. The SA has an incredibly weak relationship with the working class. Individual members are, of course, some of the best rank-and-file union activists in the country. However, as an organisation we stand in a relationship to the working class which is not much more substantial than one in which we merely advertise our existence to the class on election day, and hold trade union seminars to make contacts. We don't act.

Our job is as follows. We need to secure the conscious agreement of ordinary people in their workplaces and communities before socialist politics can prevail. So, we need to be part of the struggle of workers inside their own organisations to win concrete demands, and to form relationships with workers in their own organisations. Said in a different way: we in SA need to develop a structured intervention in the working class within a timeframe that puts demands upon us of a sort that demonstrate a commitment to the centrality of the working class in socialist struggle. *There is as yet no systematic SA involvement in these biggest collective organisations of the working class*, despite the fact that there is more debate than ever at present about SA placing itself to capture the unions disaffiliating from the ALP, especially those in Victoria. Yet, we have not even done the rudimentary work amongst rank-and-file unionists to capitalise on these disaffiliations from the ALP and the general disaffection with and depression about the Government. Why not? To us, it seems like inconsistent madness.

SA is not *by definition* the best grouping to lead the unions and their industrial struggles. Our proposal is that SA comrades now work hard in order to become that best grouping of advocates for workers in their trade unions. The trade unions are the most dominant organisations of the working class, and a top priority for the allocation of the energies and resources of the SA, which should be directed in making political interventions into them. This is a central orientation we propose for SA over the coming years before the next federal election.

We realise well that there are lots of things that can be done in union work, and what we propose below only covers

a few of them. However, we think these points below are the most important tasks, taking priority because they are things which start preparing the ground for the development of a long-term perspective on SA's orientation to the trade unions. In general, we believe that the groundwork should be laid for the development of militant, rank-and-file networks or caucuses in unions, particularly through an involvement in and solidarity with industrial struggles. This could be structured along four main lines of development, and we note them here, starting from the immediate objective (in point 1), moving through two medium-term objectives (points 2 and 3), and finishing with the longer-term objective (point 4). They are not exhaustive:

1. Each union where the SA has comrades should be assessed. This would include things such as assessing the present state of the leadership of the particular union, finding out about the issues facing the union, investigating how the union is responding on those issues, devising what we think is a necessary union response on those issues, investigating all the responses of any militant caucuses or pre-existing rank-and-file groups. On the basis of such assessments, the SA comrades in that union should try to plot out a short, medium and long-term course of action. This will involve joining in with an existing left caucus if that is at all possible, or else trying to find, cultivate and rally militants already in the union. Most likely comrades will 'get the ball rolling' in forming such political relationships around an immediate single issue in the workplace or union. That would be a good start.

2. That would be such a good start, that SA comrades who manage to join or form such caucuses in unions should be able to begin to develop caucus platforms. These could start out from the single workplace issues we mention in point 1, but, we suggest, could draw connections with and put particular emphasis on the issues of:

- democracy and accountability in their own union specifically, and in the labour movement more broadly;
- fostering commitment amongst workmates to the idea of rank-and-file action as politically preferable over reliance on the courts etc;
- becoming familiar with union rights and industrial laws, and seeking to raise the level of general knowledge about these things amongst the rank-and-file;
- rallying workmates around the traditional industrial issues such as pay, conditions, occupational health and safety, social hostility towards the boss;
- becoming familiar with and generous in knowledge about wider industry and production matters, suggesting policies for workmates' roles in developing community links for wider social justice matters, such as environmental concerns and humanitarian issues.

According to us, it is absolutely fundamental to the prospects of creating a new class struggle leadership in the labour movement that such caucuses are built on a broad class struggle basis, and *not* on a token lip service to "socialism". The above suggestions about how to orientate to workmates in workplaces where SA members are placed is designed, as we've said, to build militant rank-and-file union caucuses. This, in turn, will lay a basis for SA comrades to fight for the political leadership of such caucuses. In turn, again, this will lay the basis for the next medium-term objective in which;

3. SA comrades consciously re-direct their energies into intervening in unions by producing rank-and-file bulletins

wherever possible. Rank-and-file bulletins, produced systematically, are the best way to make political arguments that are relevant to the issues workers are dealing with in any given union that we decide to target, and the best way of cohering union activists around an SA programme. Where possible, we should propose the creation of formal opposition groupings in unions and announce this in rank-and-file bulletins, or, where such groupings already exist, we should be active in them. Further, SA is positioned to demonstrate that isolated union matters are tied to bigger working-class concerns, such as the devastating 'slowburn' effect of individual contracts (AWAs) and causalisation.

The precise details for the production of rank-and-file bulletins need not be worked out in detail now and can be worked out as their production becomes a real possibility in any workplace. The general idea is that militant caucuses, once formed, should endeavour, in a rank-and-file publication, to cover industrial and workplace and political issues in a 'nitty gritty' style.

We point out that two out of the twelve cognate segments of the platform are relevant here, and we include these here to remind people what we already have. Amongst other things, caucuses could cohere politically around these segments of the platform.

Full union rights

- Every worker should have the right to join a union and oblige their employer to recognise and negotiate with the union. Unions should have the right to gain access to workplaces, to inspect company plans and books, to strike, to picket effectively, and to act in solidarity with other unions or social causes.
- Repeal anti-union laws—the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45 D and E of the Trade Practices Act.
- No individual contracts
- Stop the attacks on workers compensation, increase the entitlements for injured workers

And,

Jobs not profits

- Shorter working week with no loss in pay; nationalise under workers' and community control companies that threaten mass sackings
- Guarantee workers' entitlements
- Stop casualisation; for full employment with permanent jobs
- Stop national competition policy massacring jobs
- For industry-wide agreements; no trading-off of jobs and conditions.
- All workers to have access to an award

Finally,

4. Once SA members have established a core group of militants in a union, and made progress with that group in developing a platform for the union, they should seek through that group to run candidates in all upcoming union elections, wherever possible, but *not* at the expense of already-existing left caucuses in unions (which they should have integrated with and galvanised). The SA should seek union electoral opportunities, but we should *not* counterpose our own candidates against other candidates who genuinely represent the need for reliance upon rank-and-file organisation and class struggle. In such cases, SA members should help to politically invigorate non-socialist candidates and offer to help with and support their campaigns. We fight for union positions on the basis of trying to convince members that we can best lead a fight for their trade union concerns, *not* on

the basis of asking them to vote for us as an act of adherence to the SA. We must earn that political adherence, and as yet, we do not have it.

In conclusion, the Socialist Alliance has the potential to become a grouping with roots in the organised working class, a grouping that is well in evidence in political, industrial and ideological battles big and small, and a grouping capable of providing a consistent class analysis, offering coherent and militant solutions for the working class. If the SA recognises the need of the Australian working class for such a political organisation, then the SA should, accordingly, recognise the need to re-orientate its energies and resources towards concerted union work.

Howard's proposed new laws would pave the way for dictatorship

Lynn Smith

The Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill 2002 proposed by the Howard Government and now being discussed by a joint House of Representatives/Senate committee would, if implemented, be the most draconian laws regarding democratic liberties in the western world.

The new laws would give a single individual (the Australian Attorney-General) similar powers to those possessed and used by the thinly disguised dictators now running Singapore and Malaysia.

Should this legislation get up, most of the rights won by Australian workers in struggle over the past century and a half would be wiped out.

The new laws are supposedly aimed at preventing terrorist attacks. However, they are so broad that you could be gaoled for up to 25 years for participating in any of the following activities:

- going on strike
- attending a picket line
- going on a street demonstration
- occupying a workplace
- organising or attending a meeting which expresses opposition to the Australian Government *or the government of any other country*
- belonging to or supporting an organisation opposed to the policies of the Australian Government *or the government of any other country*
- hacking into the computer system of a government, quasi-government or defence body

Think this sounds too bad to be true? Check the proposed laws and related parliamentary speeches for yourself at: www.apf.gov.au

Summary of the key points.

Take a deep breath before you read them. These laws were not lifted from the statutes of the Stalinists in Beijing. Or those of the Burmese junta. They were formulated by the ever-smiling, happily-jogging, floppy-hatted Little Johnny and his refugee-hating mates in good ol' Canberra.

The offence of terrorism

Newly created.

- maximum punishment: 25 years in prison

Terrorism is defined as "an act committed for a political, religious or ideological purpose designed to intimidate the public with regards to its security and intended to cause serious damage to persons, property or infrastructure".

ASIO's new powers

Australia's secret police would NOT need a judge's permission to obtain warrants. All they would need is the approval of the federal Attorney-General: a politician appointed by the Prime Minister of the day.

Such warrants would allow:

- 48 hour detention which can be renewed
- strip searching (not on children under 10)

Who could be detained?

- suspected terrorists *and people who may know something about terrorism*

Your rights if detained?

Forget it. You wouldn't have any.

refusing to answer questions while detained is punishable by a maximum of five years' imprisonment.

detention is without public knowledge and *without access to lawyers, family and friends*

the onus is on the detained person to *prove they do not know something* if they wish to avoid punishment. This is a reversal of the time-honoured tradition requiring an accuser to prove guilt and assume innocence until that time.

Banning organisations and individuals

The federal Attorney General may ban an organisation which endangers the security *or integrity* of Australia *or another country*.

The ban applies to organisations and individual members.

At the time of going to press, the Democrats and the Greens oppose the new laws. However, the Labor Party is happy to let the bills go through with the following minor amendments:

- people detained by ASIO may have access to ASIO-approved lawyers
- self-incriminating material revealed during interrogation not be used in future legal proceedings
- guaranteed maximum detention period
- public reporting of the number (no names) of people in detention at any one time

The ALP's petty tinkering is NOT an appropriate response to what is an all-out assault on democratic rights by the Howard Liberal/National Party Government. Vaguely-worded phrases like "intimidate the public" ... "cause serious damage to property" ... "know something about terrorism", are so absurdly broad that they could be used to intimidate and gaoil virtually any opponent of the Australian Government *or any other regime the Australian Government happens to be cosy with*. It is legislation such as this which allowed Malaysia's PM Mahatir to gaoil his deputy Anwar without due process and which allows the Lee Kwan Yew regime in Singapore to detain, without trial, people who organise street marches against its policies.

While the present Australian Government is too probably too weak to use the legislation to attack workers' organisations, they may well use it to "test the water" by attacking groups they have shown they can whip up prejudice against e.g. Muslim organisations, eccentric religious sects, anti-capitalist groups, supporters of national liberation movements, refugee support groups etc. And there's little doubt that should a fascist organisation gain power here, any defence of workers' rights would be called

"terrorism" and these laws would then be used to crush all forms of opposition.

As a UTS law lecturer puts it, Howard's proposed legislation is a "dictator's wet dream".

This legislation must be met with the strongest possible opposition from rank-and-file ALP members and from trade unionists who, after all, contribute a great deal of money to the ALP.

workers' Liberty comrades are at the forefront on this issue within the Socialist Alliance, moving motions that workplace meetings be organised to discuss the legislation and mobilise to build opposition to it. The crean ALP leadership must be urged to reject this bill in its entirety.

PSA: more lost than won

Janet Burstall

The Public Service Association of New South Wales recently held its Annual Conference. The following analysis of the current state of the union was written by Janet Burstall as a leaflet by the Progressive PSA, a rank-and-file grouping in the union, for the Annual Conference [ed.].

The President has a number of winning campaigns to report. The paid maternity leave case at the Australian Catholic University and the Pay Equity win for library workers are both likely to set highly significant precedents, which could eventually benefit an enormous number of women at work. The women's conference and the Aboriginal delegates' training course show our union working to reach a diverse workforce.

While the PSA put in a great effort on the workers' compensation campaign, the President's report neglects the vital question on this topic — why are the unions not continuing the campaign to defeat the Government's changes, which are aimed at reducing costs, i.e. reducing the benefits available to injured workers?

The overwhelming problem affecting the entire public sector workforce is the demoralisation and stress of nearly two decades of constant "downsizing", restructuring, redundancies and redeployments, "productivity" deals, cuts, casualisation, use of agency staff and "outsourcing". The same issues of low pay, short staffing, restructuring and demoralisation are affecting public sector workers across the board — teachers, nurses, bus drivers, DOCS workers — have all been in the news for going up against the Government. There is plenty of scope for strength through unity across the public sector.

Our other wins in the PSA, important as they are, do not address these core problems of public sector workers. And the General Secretary's report on arbitration shows how central these issues still are.

Once again, we have a pay deal with a "productivity component" that is not funded by Treasury. Once again, the PSA will be presented with a cost-cutting job by the Government — this time in the form of Corporate Services Reform, Procurement and IT. Which one of these three affects staffing most of all? Which one of these three has been given the highest priority by the Government? The answer is the same — Corporate Services Reform.

The PSA has not agreed to the 6% productivity savings, according to the *Arbitration Report*. But formal agreement by the PSA to the 6% productivity savings is hardly necessary if the union doesn't actually take any action to prevent the Government from implementing it.

The Teachers' Federation has shown more resolve. They did not sign up to the memorandum of understanding around finding productivities to fund pay rises. TAFE teachers are holding branch meetings before the June 4 budget to demand Treasury funding for their pay rises, and to oppose cuts in courses and subjects.

By having their pay increases tied to productivity savings, public sector workers are put in a position of saying that one person's pay rise is literally another person's job, otherwise they appear as opponents of "efficiency" if they try to oppose this review. This is a false choice.

The PSA needs a much more active policy on both these issues, and we need to be serious about educating our membership on it, to get out of this sham position of saying that formally we do not accept the Government's job cuts, but actually doing nothing to stop them.

We need a policy that unequivocally opposes all productivity-funded pay increases, that bans the PSA from signing any memorandums of understanding with the Government that link pay rises to productivity savings. We do not participate in any productivity reviews without a total change in their purpose and our role in them. We need a comprehensive set of tactics that could be used to stop the Government from imposing productivity savings on us, even when we have not formally agreed to them. These tactics include making close alliances with other unions in a similar position, and campaigning for other public sector unions to refuse to accept productivity deals. They might include going to the Industrial Commission and applying to remove the percentage of the pay rise that is funded by productivity, and relaunching an industrial campaign for the same pay rise to be Treasury-funded. Proving we are serious will not be easy.

The PSA needs a policy for public sector efficiency. Public sector workers do care about the services we provide and the public for whom we provide them. If we had proper guarantees, we could identify any *number* of efficiencies that could both improve working conditions, employment levels and the services offered to the public.

If our scope for identifying efficiencies included the State budget, senior management and the unnecessary duplication of public services in private sector services, and if efficiencies were not primarily aimed at cutting budgets, then we would have a lot to offer. We have no choice but to obstruct the type of "efficiency and productivity" programmes of the Government, because it is *always* our members who bear the costs of the stress of restructuring, redeployment, redundancies, increased workloads, and insecurity and low morale, to name just a few.

A small but possibly significant step to help us to turn around our poor working conditions is the proposal of the PSA and the TCFUA to add, to draft Industrial Relation legislation, provision for union coverage of so called "contractors and self-employees", usually outworkers and others who are technically self-employed, but in reality have no more independent means than any direct employee. However, even achieving that will not give us the power to challenge the relentless drive of governments to make public

sector workers pay, pay, and pay again, if we don't start mobilising our membership to stand up to this Government.

When the Government sets its mind to a change that is not easily put before the Industrial Commission, the PSA seems almost powerless to challenge it. On the Public Sector Management Act, the Government has opened up Grade 1-6 positions to public advertisement — against the express policy of the PSA. Whether or not you agree with the policy, the union is left looking impotent and ineffective.

The decline is not halting. We have hoped that each restructure will be the last. They go on and on. The PSA can no longer afford to go on and on with the same old approach to the problem. The public sector workforce of NSW needs a new determination and new policies of resistance to stop the decline and rebuild a public sector that can provide excellent services to the people of NSW, with decent working conditions and job fulfilment for those of us delivering the services

Pay Equity Struggle wins

By Leon Parissi

Women in general and library staff in particular had a big win on 28 March 2002. On that day the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW granted library and archives workers a gender based 'catch up' pay rise of up to 25% (with most getting about 10-15%). This win was the result of a determined group of PSA delegates formulating and pushing hard within the union for their claim. It shows what can be achieved by ordinary union members who organise effectively.

An official PSA delegates working party has been meeting regularly since October 1996 on this campaign. This working party formulated the details with salary rates, career structure and a strategy to push within the union for it to be accepted as a realistic and legitimate claim. The delegates group argued that what we were asking for in pay increases and new grading structure was achievable, and that we had a genuine gender based claim. As the case went to Court members of the working group met with union officials and the legal team to formulate a strategy for winning the claim using the newly introduced Equal Remuneration Principle. At all times during this long process the delegates kept in touch with members providing progress reports through the informal library network and formal meetings of the membership. Other gender based pay claims will surely follow. There is a lesson here that union members do have the ability and drive to make their case heard sometimes against entrenched opposition.

Leading up to the final award hearing on 29 July the delegates and PSA officials have been busy meeting with the employers to finalise unresolved matters including the level descriptors (which can be used to grade jobs) and whether there is a place for Job Evaluation in this innovative system. The PSA made a strong case against using Job Evaluation schemes for grading positions and this argument was essentially accepted by the Commission.

Readers of the union journal would be forgiven for not being aware of any of these important outstanding matters. They would also have not been informed about

some of the implications of the new Award (such as the potential impact on Job Evaluation as a method of grading jobs) or how such an important decision was organised, campaigned for and won.

According to our union journal the only people who had anything to do with the new Library & Archives Award are paid PSA officials and that affected members got a 25% pay increase (neither claim is entirely correct). The names of the delegates who were mainly responsible for formulating the case have not been mentioned while certain paid officials have taken all the credit. For example

It would have been useful to union members to learn something of the nature of the win and the way it was accomplished. But the union journal, Red Tape, is not that sort of journal. It is traditionally been used as a factional weapon of the leadership group. Could it be that because none of the Working Party are factional allies of the ruling group the rest of the leadership's behaviour is explained. Some are members of opposition group, the Progressive PSA, others are independent. It is certainly fair enough for the leadership to get credit for accepting and funding the case so that we had a very clever legal team putting the case to the Commission. But there are more important lessons for the broader PSA membership beyond what is written about in official accounts

Socialist Alliance

Socialist Alliance NSW state pre-conference to preselect upper house candidates for the NSW elections, 3 August, University of Technology Sydney. Also fundraising dinner at Herb Greedy Hall, Marrickville, on the night of Saturday 3 August. Tickets \$25/\$15.

Teenagers' corner

"Think about refugees as people, not as something else"

Interview with Rosa Brown

Lynn Smith

Rosa is a Year 7 student at an inner Sydney high school. She has three pen friends in Villawood Detention Centre. As we go to press, Rosa and her classmate, Katie, have persuaded nineteen of their schoolmates and four parents to sign a petition supporting the demands of *ChilOut* (children out of mandatory detention).

WORKERS' LIBERTY: When did you first decide to win support for refugees?

In June last year I went to a rally in Canberra where I was living at the time. After the rally I asked one of the speakers if there was anyone I could write to who was in mandatory detention.

WL: What are your pen friends' names and where are they from?

ROSA: Reem and Rana came from Iran. And Afnan is from Iraq. Afnan has been in detention for two and a half years (a year in Port Hedland, a year in Curtin and six months in Villawood). Reem and Rana have been at Villawood for fourteen months.

WL: Have you visited your friends at Villawood Detention Centre?

ROSA: Yes, I have. You walk past heaps of razor wire... there's razor wire everywhere. It's not very nice.

At first we didn't know what to say to each other. Then we talked about World Cup soccer. I also played tips with Reem and Rana and Afnan on their play equipment.

WL: Do Reem, Rana and Afnan have school classes at Villawood?

ROSA: They get a bit of schooling... mostly English lessons. But not much else.

WL: What did people say when your first started trying to get support for refugees at school?

ROSA: When the Tampa incident happened last year, one of the boys in my class came to school saying his father said "give me a gun and I'll shoot the lot of them".

But if you tell people the refugee's stories, it's harder for them to say "no".

If you know their stories it helps you to think about refugees as people, not as something else.

The boy who said his father wanted to shoot the people on the Tampa has now signed our petition.

WL: Is there support for refugees in other schools that you know of?

ROSA: At Fort Street High in Petersham a group of thirty or forty students are painting a mural for the National Day of Action march this Sunday (June 23). We email each other.

Are European workers on the move?

Leon Parissi

The first half of 2002 has brought us signs of organised workers in Europe stirring on a large scale. A highly successful Italian general strike in April this year involved 13 million workers. Since then smaller scale strikes have continued to protest the Italian Government's plans to reverse legislation established in 1974 which protects workers against being fired. As we go to press, there are reports of a successful general strike on 20 June in Spain with 10 million involved. The Spanish revolt protested plans to restrict unemployment benefits and other workers' benefits. These actions together with smaller scale strikes in Germany all look promising. The intentions of union leaderships in these actions have been to defend past gains and seem to be more of a protest, rather than real fights to win. But even this level of response is a sign of hope after the depressed state of worker combativity in the 1980's and 1990's. Many workers appear to be impatient with the defeats of past years following continual attacks by bosses and their governments.

How this situation might translate onto the political sphere is more advanced in France where there have been signs of a fight back by workers since the relatively successful anti-austerity strikes of 1995. The organised working class in France didn't suffer the severe defeats as did the British unions did under Thatcher in the 1980's. But the hopes of the Socialist Party/Communist Party/Green coalition government under Jospin has turned largely to disillusionment. In France the historically low voter turnout in the April Presidential first round and again in the National Assembly elections in June reflects a disillusionment with the left coalition government's "cohabitation" with the conservative Chirac Presidency. The Presidential second round policy by the 'cohabitation' left of a vote for Chirac to keep out Le Pen seemed to work in so far as the FN didn't win the Presidency. Nor, against expectations, did the FN win any National Assembly seats. Abstentions decreased in the second Presidential round then shot up again in the elections for a government. The National Assembly second round saw a 39.7% overall abstention with 14 of 180 districts

recording over 50% abstention rates, according to an Indymedia report. The cohabitation parties all suffered losses with their total number of seats declining from 248 to 140 giving the pro-Chirac government an absolute majority in the Assembly. From the point of view of working-class representation, the strategy of 'vote for Chirac with a clothes peg on your nose' was a failure. What was the far-left response and how did they respond...

John Bulaitis (a supporter of the "Socialist Solidarity Network", now living in France) and Martin Thomas (Alliance for Workers' Liberty) debate whether socialists should have supported a vote for Chirac in the second round of the French Presidential election.

John Bulaitis writes:

I am currently in France and witnessing at first hand the magnificent mobilisations against the Front National (FN). But I have taken the time to check the websites of the British farleft. If anything displays the dogmatism and sectarianism of much of the British farleft, it is the position taken in relation to the second-round of the elections.

The question posed is very simple. Are you in favour of an electoral defeat of Le Pen or not? Yet, reading the articles on France, I find it hard to find straight answers. The Socialist (26 April) claims that "a strong showing of ballot papers rejecting both Chirac and Le Pen would be a warning of opposition to the capitalist policies which both advocate". In other words, the best thing to do is spoil the ballot.

Of course, Chirac and Le Pen both represent capitalist policies. What an amazing discovering The Socialist has made! But if the contest had been between Jospin and Le Pen, they too would have also both represented capitalist policies.

The point is for the millions who have mobilised in France, Le Pen represents much else besides. Imagine what images his call for "transit camps" to store immigrants in before they are deported conjures up in a country that saw "transit camps" set up by the Nazis for the Jews and resistance fighters, before they were deported to the other form of "camp" — the death camp. The FN may not be a classical fascist party. But a FN victory would pose a serious threat to the workers' movement, the left, the minorities, women and youth in France.

As for *Socialist Worker* (4 May) one scratches one's head to work out what is being advocated. But the interview with their (French) sister organisation strongly implies that an abstention is the best approach. And, it should be remembered that the SWP's French group supported Lutte Ouvrière in the first round of the elections, against the less sectarian LCR campaign which raised centrally the anti-globalisation struggle. And Lutte Ouvrière is now arguing strongly for a spoilt ballot position.

And then there is the Communist Party Great Britain (CPGB) (a post-stalinist plitical formation -ed) who call for an "active boycott" — whatever that means. According to *Weekly Worker* (2 May), the slogan "Votez escro, pas fascho (vote for a crook, not a fascist) ... plays into the hands of the ruling class..." because "a sweeping victory for Chirac" would be claimed as "a vote of confidence in the current order."

The truth is, the youth who took to the streets and raised this slogan have a revolutionary instinct a thousand times stronger than our CPGB scribe. It is self-evident that the slogan itself implies no illusions, or support for Chirac. The very fact that hundreds of thousands have been taking to the

streets each night, culminating in the historic 2 million strong May Day demonstrations shows it is understood instinctively that the fascists will be defeated by the mass movement and not simply at the ballot box. Otherwise, why take to the streets?

Those who argue for a boycott, of whatever form, are in practice suggesting that the result of the second round in terms of votes cast does not matter. But it is only necessary to pose the question as to why this mass movement has developed in the first place? The spark was the electoral success of Le Pen in the election's first round — in other words, the threat of Le Pen winning the second round and becoming President of France. That is why everyone who has taken to the streets understands that the result of next Sunday's election matters, except of course the hardened sectarians who have sheepishly followed the wake of the movement.

For the youth who spontaneously came out on the streets, who have grown in confidence as the demonstrations have developed, who have triggered the biggest demonstrations since the Liberation, the result next week is absolutely vital. And, their instinct is correct. If the FN were to receive 25%, 30% or 35%, then inevitably the dynamic behind the party would be strengthened. That would be a defeat.

If the FN were to gain such a vote, the youth and those who have mobilised would be on the retreat. On the other hand, if the FN vote were to go down, then the dynamic of the FN could be checked. Doubts would set in amongst some of its less committed supporters. Those in the mass movement against it would become even more confident.

The outlook of those on the demos in Paris is that they are going to vote, not for Chirac, but against Le Pen. In that sense, the LCR's position in France, criticised in *Weekly Worker* is not ambiguous but is understood perfectly by all participating in the mass movement, even if not in the *Weekly Worker* editorial office.

The idea that Chirac and his reactionary politics will be strengthened by a crushing defeat for Le Pen is an argument that at best completely misunderstands the position in France, and at worst reveals a haughty contempt for the youth and others who have taken to the streets. In fact the opposite is the case. If a campaign along the lines suggested by the CPGB, and Lutte Ouvrière in France, had some success and many abstained, thus leading to a higher percentage for the NF, then Chirac would feel more confident in carrying out his right-wing agenda. He would probably feel the pressure to orientate even further towards the right to appease NF voters. And the pressure would be on the social movement to hold in check, because the argument would be that, if you don't, there is the NF waiting in the wings.

On the other hand, Chirac and his supporters are beginning to realise that they face the problem of "legitimacy" if elected by 85-90% of the vote. In that situation, paradoxically, Chirac would be a weakened presidency, elected with a historically low vote for a sitting president in the first round, and with the votes of the left in the second round. Chirac knows that. The movement instinctively understands that, which is why on the May Day demo, many people were already raising the slogan: "pour un troisième tour social".

Perhaps the politics of abstention make some individuals feel that they have done their revolutionary duty by not voting

for a bourgeois candidate. But since when have Marxists been opposed on principle to voting for a Bourgeois candidate when tactically it can advance the movement? The British farleft is once again demonstrating its sectarian dogmatism, rather than knowing how to engage with the mass movement.

Martin Thomas replies:

"All methods are good", wrote Leon Trotsky, "which raise the class-consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in the struggle". The Italian revolutionary communist Antonio Gramsci expressed the same thought. "The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it ever more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself".

The central, all-defining axis of all our activity as Marxists is to help the working class to organise itself independently from, and in opposition to, all factions of the capitalist class, to gain confidence in its own strength, and to look to its own efforts to remake society. For that reason, it is a principle not to vote for bourgeois politicians like Jacques Chirac. If the presidential run-off in France had seen Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party confront Le Pen, a good case could be made for voting for Jospin, not because Marxists support Jospin's politics, but because we support the labour movement, even under bad leadership, and a vote for Jospin could be a vote with the labour movement to assert itself against Le Pen and prepare the way for replacing Jospin with a better leader. No analogy in Chirac's case: we do not support his Tory party, the RPR, any more than we support Chirac himself.

Can there be exceptions to the Marxist principle of not voting for bourgeois parties? Maybe. But then a special case must be made. No such special case can be made for 5 May. Workers could have voted against Le Pen by casting blank ballots much better than by voting for Chirac. Arlette Laguiller did call for blank ballots. Olivier Besancenot's LCR first blurredly suggested blank ballots or abstention, then on 28 April, shamefully, went over to voting Chirac.

Suppose, to take the extreme case, that the LCR, and the Communist Party and Socialist Party too, had called for blank ballots and been able to convince all their voters. Then the second-round result would have been maybe 30% Chirac, 17% Le Pen, 38% blank votes, 15% abstentions. Le Pen's vote might have been sizeably lower in that case, since the strong blank-vote movement would win over some disoriented people who would otherwise vote Le Pen as the only way of expressing their utter disgust with the status quo. But, in any case, that a compact force of 38% would defy both Chirac and Le Pen would be a tremendous, self-boosting gesture of working-class political independence, sufficient not only to push back Chirac's coming attacks but to put social revolution on the agenda.

There were never going to be that many blank votes. If the revolutionary left had had the power to swing that many votes just by its leaflets between the first and second rounds, then it would also have had the power to top the poll in the first round! But examining the extreme case shows up the

cravenness of the “vote Chirac” argument. Oh no, it wails, in that case the bourgeois media could report that Le Pen got 36% of the valid votes! No-one would notice the blank votes?

Those who will renounce rallying their own forces and vote Chirac just to get “a good press” from the bourgeoisie will never teach the workers self-reliance. In actual fact, the debate about voting Chirac or voting blank was a debate about how many of their three million voters the revolutionary left could hold to an independent position in the second round. They were never going to be able to hold them all. It was a new, loose, unconsolidated three million, not a compact electorate “pre-ordered over a long period”.

Despite Laguiller’s call for a blank vote, 72% of her first-round voters went over to Chirac. That 4.8% voted blank is an excellent result in the circumstance, especially given the not-very-adroit manner of Laguiller’s appeal, which must have come across to some people as dismissing Le Pen as no threat at all. As the French Marxist bulletin *Liaisons* puts it, “To the contrary of all the official analyses, it must be said that the maintenance of a high level of blank votes and abstentions is an important sign for the future of the social movement’s will for independence”.

Ah, but what if the revolutionaries abstaining meant Le Pen winning? Well, there should be a limit to the “what if”s. Are John Bulaitis, the LCR and their co-thinkers proposing a general rule of always voting for whomever seems best placed to defeat the far right, even if it’s someone like Chirac? In that case the rule would mean voting for a Tory in an election in Britain when they’re the best-placed against the BNP, for example, in the manner of the SWP’s abject 1990s slogan, “Don’t vote Nazi”.

It would mean that the revolutionary left should have avoided standing in the presidential first round, and corralled as many of their supporters as they could into voting Jospin, so as to avoid the risk, which actually materialised, of Le Pen going forward to the run-off. One implication of revolutionary socialists voting Chirac in the second round was to condemn themselves for having dared to stand in the first round.

They’re not arguing a general rule? They’re arguing that there was something special about this particular vote, the presidential second round, which made it an exception? Then they have to argue their case on the actual circumstances, not on “what if”s. The shortest answer, however, is that if the situation in France were different, and a fascist seizure of power really were an immediate risk, then the revolutionaries should be working for a general strike and the creation of workers’ militias — not for a Chirac vote! In that situation, president Chirac would be likely to bring Le Pen to power — as president Hindenburg, the Social Democrats’ “lesser evil” against Hitler in the presidential poll in Germany in 1932, installed Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933.

Ah, but the left-wing Chirac supporters voted with gloves on their hands and pegs on their noses, they marched on the streets — so wasn’t voting Chirac all right really? Just a little bit of paper in the ballot box! Just a tiny breach of principle, not a big one! Excuse us for a minute or two in the polling booth, and then we’ll be back to class-struggle politics! We weren’t really supporting Chirac!

Not supporting him? No — just voting for him to occupy the most powerful position in France! How much more support could Chirac ever have hoped for from the revolutionary left?

He could hardly have hoped that the LCR would disband and join the RPR.

Of course no second-round total for Chirac, however big, could make everyone forget that his second-round voters had voted differently on the first round. Of course it could not wipe out the impetus from the street demonstrations. But it could help. There is a flat contradiction between John Bulaitis’ anxious electoralism about votes for Le Pen and his bland assurance that Chirac gained nothing by getting more votes. In relation to Le Pen, Bulaitis argues that everything must be subordinated to the task, not even of reducing his vote, but of reducing its appearance in the bourgeois media, its headline percentage. In relation to Chirac, just the opposite: extra votes for him didn’t matter, or may somehow have weakened him! The double standard makes no sense. Either votes are important, or they’re not.

They are important — which is why we should not cast our votes for Chirac. As *Liaisons* points out, Chirac has been “helped by those according to whom we have just seen a referendum for the Republic — the [very undemocratic] 5th Republic — by way of the Chirac vote and who thus pave the way for a new left-right ‘cohabitation’ after the legislative elections... We have just seen a little coup d’etat to save the rotten regime of the 5th Republic.

“Forty-four years ago, the paratroopers of Colonel Massu and the Algiers Committee of Public Safety installed De Gaulle in power, and the left of the time saw him either as the saviour of the Republic, or as the lesser evil. In the last fortnight, a junior officer of the colonial army, a former torturer, has served to deprive the workers and democracy of the possibility of throwing out Chirac in these elections and to create pressure on them to vote for him and thus facilitate his work in future”.

But, as *Liaisons* also remarks, nothing is settled. “To beat the right in the legislative elections; to push forward candidates standing for a break [from the ‘republican’ consensus]; to construct, with the revolutionary left and the forces available, socialist and democratic alliances against the bosses, the right, and the 5th Republic — those are the tasks posed now, each one linked with the others”.

France

Strange days.

Vincent Pr sumey, 12 May 2002.

In France, between the evening of Sunday 21 April 2002 (first round of the presidential elections) and the evening of Sunday 5 May (second round), it has been a slightly crazy fortnight, very tiring and trying, often inspiring too.

The presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of those elections, which are the heart of French political life in the system of the Fifth Republic as it has operated for four decades, has literally sparked a mass uprising of the people — a typically national phenomenon which has deep roots reaching back to the Revolution.

It began on the evening of 21 April, and, from the following morning, high school students, sometimes only 12 or 13 years old, and university students, struck and demonstrated all over the country. In Paris, the schools were on holiday, but the mobilisation of young people was still powerful. And, to start with, totally spontaneous. The teachers followed the

students. Then, finally, their parents, that is, the great majority of wage-workers, blue and white collar, together with pensioners and people of all sorts, of all conditions, and, of course, of all colours, came out on May Day, transforming the trade union rallies into gigantic multicoloured forums. There were at least two million people on that streets that day.

The paradox of those days was the following: there was reckoned to be a fascist danger. High school students photocopied leaflets full of spelling mistakes explaining that in 1933 the Nazis had first come for the Jews, then the communists, then everyone, and that when those who had been passive were taken in their turn to the concentration camps, there was no longer anyone to defend them; and that there was a danger of the same thing happening in France, all at once, on the night of 5 May! Yet during those two crazy weeks, anyone out and about in our country saw anti-fascists everywhere, usually young people, cheered on by older people at their windows, and no fascists. The fascists, without presenting themselves as such, gathered, under heavy police protection and in a woeful sort of way, in numbers of about 20,000 for their own May Day march and then for one single failed meeting, in Marseilles — and that's all.

What is at stake?

Why then was there such a powerful mobilisation? In revulsion against Le Pen and all he represents, of course, but also because the fact of having Le Pen and Chirac in the second round was seen, rightly, by millions of young people and workers as a scandal and an insult. That situation was due not to a significant breakthrough by Le Pen, but to the collapse of the traditional parties of the left, with the Socialist Party (PS) down to 16% where its "potential" score was around 25%, and the Communist Party (PC) down to 3%, crushed behind two Trotskyist candidates. That collapse, in fact, went together with a very strong shift to the left. The three Trotskyist candidates got 10.5% between them — which is a real shift, a real breakthrough — the majority of the abstainers (27% of the electoral roll) were people of the left, disillusioned and saying so, and many of the votes of the three other candidates who came from the left government coalition but presented themselves as more or less breaking from it, the "republican" Chevènement, the ecologist Mamère and the former campaigner for the independence of French Guyana, Taubira, were also critical left-wing votes. That an election shaped by such a radicalisation, such a shift to the left, should lead to a veritable confiscation of the votes, with a choice reduced to the outgoing president, whom many hoped to see beaten and brought to justice for corruption, Chirac, and a fascist, produced a gale of rebellion.

At stake here is the undemocratic character of French institutions, born from a coup d'état in 1958. Indeed, what has just happened has much in common, in many ways, with the events of May 1958, of which the younger generation has only a very vague idea. It was a military coup by the far right in Algiers which produced the "appeal" to General De Gaulle, presented as the saviour of the nation, and immediately supported by a section of the left. Even those who did not back him in 1958 later supported him against the military conspiracies of the same type, but aimed against him, of the partisans of "French Algeria". In some ways, the confiscation of democracy which was the result of the vote of 21 April rang like a coup d'état, and led to a huge rallying to voting Chirac from the overwhelming majority of the left parties and the unions, in the name of a fascist danger represented by Le Pen, the heir of the putschists of 1958. The result may be to

put the Fifth Republic and its re-elected president Jacques Chirac — up until then the weakest, the most illegitimate, the most despised, that it had had — back in the saddle.

That rallying also drew in a large section of young people and rank-and-file workers, who voted Chirac with rage in their hearts and who reckoned that, to compensate for it, it was all the more necessary for them to demonstrate in the streets. As they said, they preferred the "super-crook" to the "super-fascist". But it must be said that, except from some high-school students, first-time voters regretting their own abstentions on 21 April, in the rallies and the demonstrations there was no conflict between people about how they would vote on 5 May, because all valued the sense of unity and strength that they felt. It was only the leaders of the left, especially the PC, very much weakened and correspondingly more vehement, who tried to denounce the abstentionists and get them booed, without success. Often the husband voted Chirac and the wife cast a blank ballot (or vice versa), and in the upshot, though Chirac had 82% of the valid votes, he only had about 61% of the electorate, because the abstentions and the blank or spoiled votes, very much on the left in their majority, reached 25%, still a very high rate.

The new Government

The leaders of the left, and of the far left too, made light of the new government formed by Jacques Chirac following the second round, saying that it was only there to look after the "transition" to the Legislative Assembly elections scheduled in June.

They are comforting themselves with empty words. This Government, led by an eminent mediocrity, Mr Raffarin (from the Liberal Democrat party, the section of the mainstream Right which does not repudiate alliances with the FN), is well-structured, well-conceived, and seems entirely competent and intellectually efficacious to serve the interests of big capital, which is directly represented in it by the Minister of Finance, Francis Mer.

This Government will immediately, without any parliamentary consultation, take far-reaching measures, notably on policing and taxes. The manner in which the ministries are grouped, and titles, indicates that it plans to accelerate what is called in France "the reform of the state", something which the leaders of the left also desire and which led to the big civil service strikes of spring 2000 under Jospin. It is about replacing public services, delivered by state functionaries, by local agencies of all sorts utilising private contractors. This orientation is found in various forms in all the member states of the European Union.

As conceived, this Government is not a government of "transition", but it stands to be enlarged after the Legislative elections. Its aim is to have those elections give a majority to the new "president's party" which is in course of being formed through the merger of the majority of the mainstream Right, and for that majority to be able to "open out" both to the left, towards the most right-wing sections of the PS, and to the far right. That aim is realistic, since on the left the continuation of heavy abstention among workers and the worse-off, combined with "tactical voting" which will mostly benefit the PS after the great fright of April, and all in the absence of any new perspectives offered by leaders who are discredited in the eyes of their voters, will weigh heavily.

The problem for the left is the following: in order to win these new elections, to give itself a new face which really declares that this time it will not govern together with Chirac and the bosses, but against them and for the workers. This new demand was expressed even before 5 May, in demonstrations, meetings and rallies all over the country.

The situation in the organisations of the left and the workers' movement

The PS is experiencing a flood of recruits among young people. The rank and file of the party, where it is still organised in the local sections, is strongly demanding a sharp turn to the left. That demand is dimly reflected in the new programme, adopted as an emergency measure, which declares for example that no more public services should be privatised. Coming so late, after numerous privatisations done by the Jospin Government, such a declaration is a bit of a joke, not very credible to the Socialist Party milieu itself. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former Minister of Finance, very well regarded in the employers' circles, says that Chirac will have to be different after 5 May, thus preparing the course whose announcement will bring defeat for the left: a new cohabitation, decked out in colours of national unity, between the left and the right. Between the desires expressed at rank-and-file level and this sort of talk, there is a gap which will produce explosions in the PS. The "Socialist left" tendency wants to avoid that above all, and, hoping to install itself in the centre of a once again reconstructed PS, it argues for the absolute necessity of left unity and single candidates of the left for the Legislative elections, while omitting to say what the political mandate of those candidates will be. If it is about carrying forward the same policies once again, they will lose the elections.

A section of the PS, represented by a young member of parliament, Arnaud Montebourg, who has been joined on this by the presidential candidates Noël Mamère and Christiane Taubira, says correctly that the candidates of the left should commit themselves, in order to be able to be representatives who actually govern and do what their voters have voted for them to do, to fight to put an end to the Fifth Republic and form a constituent assembly. As early as 6 May, Francois Hollande, the First Secretary of the Party, replied to them, via an interview in the newspaper *Le Monde*, that there could be no question of that. This current is weak, with little social anchorage, but it expresses a democratic demand which is at the heart of France's current problems.

While there is scarcely any doubt that the PS will remain a key party in the coming months, the blow that the PC has received may be decisive. The collapse of this party has not yet produced any currents proposing new perspectives, but it has created a vacuum. In the unions, where it has the bulk of its networks of support and its activists, who still lead decisive organisations (the CGT and, among teachers, the FSU), those trade unionists are being led either to shift to the left, or to become direct partners of the PS, which seems to be the attitude of the leaders of the CGT.

The other organisation recruiting heavily today, besides the PS, the unions, and the high-school and university student associations, is the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), deluged by such large numbers of applications to join or to make contact that it has difficulty dealing with them all. This is a result of the score, heavily concentrated among youth (almost 14% of the votes cast by 18-24 year olds), of its candidate, Olivier Besancenot, an unexpected success for the LCR. But the more that the LCR is able to fit itself to the immediate situation and the mood of the youth at a given moment (for example, in its half-said appeal to vote Chirac on 5 May, garnished with a call to demonstrate that same evening), the more it fails to pose in its totality the question of the political way out from the present situation, and seems rather indifferent to the problems of the institutions of the Fifth Republic and of how to win a real victory for the left in the Legislative elections.

Yet the LCR has, among the three Trotskyist parties present in the election, the least sectarian attitude. If, despite their own reluctance, we add up the votes of those three parties, they come to 10.5%, a high score. For the present, they do not seem to take account of it and look towards a unification or at least a coalition in the manner of the British Socialist Alliances, something which would demand that each faction goes beyond its own limits.

LO (Lutte Ouvrière), despite Arlette Laguiller's score of over 5%, in fact suffered a relative political setback on 21 April, ceasing to have the quasi-monopoly of the "far left" vote in national polls. The very denunciatory manner in which it attacked the Chirac vote, declaring that "the left is prostituting itself", helped its enemies, notably the PC, to isolate it. Refusing to make an agreement with the LCR, LO is preparing to present candidates in every electorate at the Legislative elections. That is regrettable, but this organisation, already very shut-off, risks turning in on itself even more: its leadership feared a score of 10% and the responsibilities it would have brought with it!

The PT (Parti des Travailleurs) should not be dismissed as a political force, even if it holds itself apart and is held apart by almost all the others. Its weak score should not obscure its trade union influence and its activist base which, paradoxically, is numerically superior to those of the LCR and LO. The very separate place occupied by this organisation is explained by the fact that this current historically has a central place in France, in relation to the Trotskyist currents in general and, more widely, in relation to the whole labour movement — the former prime minister Lionel Jospin comes from it, for example. Its current marginalisation, in part deserved by its haughty disdain for workers' unity (in the FO unions the PT fought where it could to stop people going to the May Day rallies!), cannot last forever.

Beyond the organisations, there is today in France an extraordinary readiness for activity and debate, among the youth and among workers in general, especially in the unions. This effervescence runs up against the dead weight of the parties in place, who are preoccupied above all with their separate electoral existences. At the peak of the state, the events of 21 April to 5 May have, however, not been positive for democracy and for the social movement. The re-elected Chirac has new room to manoeuvre, and the FN, even if reckoned at its true strength, has also been "relaunched". The coming Legislative elections and the social confrontations which are bound to take place will doubtless decide the course of events for some years at least: a lasting victory for Chirac, and the reinforcement of a renovated Fifth Republic, or a new destabilisation of the regime and its president and an aggressive upsurge of strikes, demonstrations, and new political regroupments, based on the rank and file and uniting, in a democratic break with the old politics, all that emerges from the crisis of the existing organisations. France is, more and more, at the crossroads, and the way things go here will also have major international significance.

(This article has been abridged for space considerations)

Confusion at the ILO? China's Government Elected to Governing Body as...Worker Delegate

Posted to the IUF website 19 June, 2002

For decades, there has been a general consensus in the democratic labour movement that the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is a component part of the Party/state power structure in China, i.e. the Chinese "unions" represent the state (backed by the army and police) and not the workers. For over a decade, the ACFTU has been mounting a sustained push for international legitimacy, in large part to allow it to more effectively support the Chinese state's economic and foreign policy objectives. And over that same period – as foreign investment has flowed into a repressive low-wage regime where the rights of foreign investors are enforced with full police powers – some national trade union centers have gradually modified their view of the ACFTU. Some have even engaged in bilateral activities with the ACFTU, a policy known as "constructive engagement".

This policy has produced no evidence of gains for Chinese workers, who continue to be systematically imprisoned for attempting to exercise their right to freedom of association. But it has brought about confusion and a creeping legitimization of the ACFTU. The consequences of this process were apparent in last week's vote by a divided Workers' Group at the International Labour Conference where a small majority decided to give the ACFTU a seat as an alternate worker delegate on the ILO Governing Body. This vote will unavoidably be seen as a softening of international labour's commitment to defending the right of Chinese workers to independent trade unions.

It is no surprise that criticism by governments of China's abysmal rights record has diminished in inverse proportion to the flow of foreign investment profiting from repression. But on this occasion it was worker delegates, not governments, who elected the ACFTU – part of a state structure that rejects ILO Conventions on freedom of association - to a seat on the governing body of an organization whose mandate consists, in part, of defending the principle of independent trade unions for workers.

The ACFTU's growing international recognition, formal or de facto, occurs at time of unprecedented worker protest and mobilization in China, as workers seek to defend themselves against the consequences of massive restructuring, unemployment, and the consequences of a free hand for transnational investors. This spring, tens of thousands of workers in the oil and metal industries launched sustained struggles for their rights as workers, and attempted to form independent organizations to negotiate with the state and its managers. The workers' leaders have been jailed – with the acquiescence of the ACFTU – but their protests and demonstrations continue.

Against this background, enhanced recognition of the ACFTU – an organization which refuses to defend working

class victims of state repression – sends an unmistakable message to Chinese workers that their demand for independent unions must remain subordinate to another agenda.

Every capitulation requires a strong dose of amnesia to facilitate acceptance. International supporters of recognition of the ACFTU can forget its statutory obligation to "uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, uphold the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, uphold Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Deng Xiaoping Thought, uphold reform and opening up...." Chinese workers cannot. Supporters of "constructive engagement" can forget the close links between the army, police and security services and the ACFTU. Chinese workers cannot. Trade union "diplomats" visiting China can forget the dangerous working conditions in China which result from the absence of genuine trade unions in the enterprises, claiming tens of thousands of workers' lives each year. Workers cannot. Proponents of "critical dialogue" can ignore the vulnerable position of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), the only independent organization of workers in China. Hong Kong workers cannot, and they can hardly rejoice in last week's vote by their sisters and brothers at the ILO.

China's working women and men will continue struggling for their rights because, as workers, they have no choice. The protests this spring are the beginning of an even larger and more broadly based workers' movement, a movement which will inevitably challenge the ACFTU as well as the Party/state and its repressive apparatus. Workers remember, and they will be asking the proponents of amnesia which side they were, and are, on.

(This article has been abridged for space considerations)

Full article can be found at the IUF International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations web site:

http://www.iuf.org.uk/cgi-bin/editorials/db.cgi?db=default&ww=1&uid=default&ID=52&iew_records=1&en=1

or from LabourStart (Where trade unionists start their day on the Net):

www.labourstart.org

Palestinian Elections Now

Edward Said

from *Al Ahram*, the largest Arabic language newspaper

Six distinct calls for Palestinian reform and elections are being uttered now: five of them are, for Palestinian purposes, both useless and irrelevant. Sharon wants reform as a way of further disabling Palestinian national life, that is, as an extension of his failed policy of constant intervention and destruction. He wants to be rid of Yasser Arafat, cut up the West Bank into fenced-in cantons, re-install an occupation authority -- preferably with some Palestinians helping out -- carry on with settlement activity, and maintain Israeli security the way he's been doing it. He is too blinded by his own ideological hallucinations and obsessions to see that this will neither bring peace nor security, and will certainly not bring the "quiet" he keeps

prattling on about. Palestinian elections in the Sharonian scheme are quite unimportant.

Second, the United States wants reform principally as a way of combating "terrorism," a panacea of a word that takes no account of history, context, society or anything else. George Bush has a visceral dislike for Arafat, and no understanding at all of the Palestinian situation. To say that he and his disheveled administration "want" anything is to dignify a series of spurts, fits, starts, retractions, denunciations, totally contradictory statements, sterile missions by various officials of his administration, and about-faces, with the status of an over-all desire, which of course doesn't exist. Incoherent, except when it comes to the pressures and agendas of the Israeli lobby and the Christian Right whose spiritual head he now is, Bush's policy consists in reality of calls for Arafat to end terrorism, and (when he wants to placate the Arabs) for someone somewhere somehow to produce a Palestinian state and a big conference, and finally, for Israel to go on getting full and unconditional US support including most probably ending Arafat's career. Beyond that, US policy waits to be formulated, by someone, somewhere, somehow. One should always keep in mind though that the Middle East is a domestic, not a foreign, policy issue in America and subject to dynamics within the society that are difficult to predict.

All this perfectly suits the Israeli demand, which wants nothing more than to make Palestinian life collectively more miserable and more unlivable, whether by military incursions or by impossible political conditions that suit Sharon's frenzied obsession with stamping out Palestinians forever. Of course there are other Israelis who want co-existence with a Palestinian state, as there are American Jews who want similar things, but neither group has any determining power now. Sharon and the Bush administration run the show.

Third, is the Arab leaders' demand which as far as I can tell is a combination of several different elements, none of them directly helpful to the Palestinians themselves. First is fear of their own populations who have been witnessing Israel's mass and essentially unopposed destruction of the Palestinian territories without any serious Arab interference or attempt at deterrence. The Beirut summit peace plan offers Israel precisely what Sharon has refused, which is land for peace, and it is a proposal without any teeth, much less one with a timetable. While it may be a good thing to have it on record as a counter-weight to Israel's naked belligerence, we should have no illusions about its real intention which, like the calls for Palestinian reform, are really tokens offered to seething Arab populations who are thoroughly sick with the mediocre inaction of their rulers. Second, of course, is the sheer exasperation of most of the Arab regimes with the whole Palestinian problem. They seem to have no ideological problem with Israel as a Jewish state without any declared boundaries, which has been in illegal military occupation of Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank for 35 years, or with Israel's dispossession of the Palestinian people. They are prepared to accommodate nicely those terrible injustices if only Arafat and his people would simply either behave or quietly go away. Third, of course, is the long-standing desire of Arab leaders to ingratiate themselves with the US and, among themselves, to vie for the title of most important US ally. Perhaps they are simply unaware of how contemptuous most Americans are of them, and how little understood or regarded is their cultural and political status in the US.

Fourth, in the chorus of reform are the Europeans. But they only scurry around sending emissaries to see Sharon and

Arafat, they make ringing declarations in Brussels, they fund a few projects and more or less leave it at that, so great is the shadow of the US over them.

Fifth, is Yasser Arafat and his circle of associates who have suddenly discovered the virtues (theoretically at least) of democracy and reform. I know that I speak at a great distance from the field of struggle, and I also know all the arguments about the besieged Arafat as a potent symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli aggression, but I have come to a point where I think none of that has any meaning anymore. Arafat is simply interested in saving himself. He has had almost ten years of freedom to run a petty kingdom and has succeeded essentially in bringing opprobrium and scorn on himself and most of his team; the Authority became a byword for brutality, autocracy and unimaginable corruption. Why anyone for a moment believes that at this stage he is capable of anything different, or that his new streamlined cabinet (dominated by the same old faces of defeat and incompetence) is going to produce actual reform, defies reason. He is the leader of a long suffering people, whom in the past year he has exposed to unacceptable pain and hardship, all of it based on a combination of his absence of a strategic plan and his unforgivable reliance on the tender mercies of Israel and the US via Oslo. Leaders of independence and liberation movements have no business exposing their unarmed people to the savagery of war criminals like Sharon, against whom there was no real defence or advance preparation. Why then provoke a war whose victims would be mostly innocent people when you have neither the military capacity to fight one nor the diplomatic leverage to end it? Having done this now three times (Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank) Arafat should not be given a chance to bring on a fourth disaster.

He has announced that elections will take place in early 2003, but his real concentration is to reorganise the security services. I have long pointed out in these columns that Arafat's security apparatus was always designed principally to serve him and Israel, since the Oslo accords were based on his having made a deal with Israel's military occupation. Israel cared only about its security, for which it held Arafat responsible (a position, by the way, he willingly accepted as early as 1992). In the meantime Arafat used the 15 or 19 or whatever the right number of groups was to play each off against the other, a tactic he perfected in Fakahani, and which is patently stupid so far as the general good is concerned. He never really reined in Hamas and Islamic Jihad which suited Israel perfectly: it would have a ready-made excuse to use the so-called martyr's (mindless) suicide bombings to further diminish and punish the whole people. If there is one thing along with Arafat's ruinous regime that has done us more harm as a cause it is this calamitous policy of killing Israeli civilians, which further proves to the world that we are indeed terrorists and an immoral movement. For what gain no one has been able to say.

Having therefore made a deal with the occupation through Oslo, Arafat was never really in a position to lead a movement to end it. And ironically, he is trying to make another deal now, both to save himself and prove to the US, Israel and the other Arabs that he deserves another chance. I myself don't care a whit for what Bush, or the Arab leaders, or Sharon says: I am interested in what we as a people think of our leader, and there I believe we must be absolutely clear in rejecting his entire programme of reform, elections, reorganising the government and security services. His record of failure is too dismal and his capacities as a leader

too enfeebled and incompetent for him to try yet again to save himself for another try.

Sixth, finally, is the Palestinian people who are now justifiably clamouring both for reform and elections. As far as I am concerned, this clamour is the only legitimate one of the six I have outlined here. It's important to point out that Arafat's present administration as well as the Legislative Council have overstayed their original term, which should have ended with a new round of elections in 1999. Moreover, the whole basis of the 1996 elections were the Oslo accords, which in effect simply licensed Arafat and his people to run bits of the West Bank and Gaza for the Israelis, without true sovereignty or security, since Israel retained control of the borders, security, land (on which it doubled and even tripled the settlements), water and air. In other words, the old basis for elections and reform, which had been Oslo, is now null and void. Any attempt to go forward on that kind of platform is simply a wasteful ploy and will produce neither reform nor real elections. Hence the current confusion which causes every Palestinian everywhere to feel chagrin and bitter frustration.

What then is to be done if the old basis of Palestinian legitimacy no longer really exists? Certainly there can be no return to Oslo, anymore than there can be to Jordanian or Israeli law. As a student of periods of important historical change, I should like to point out that when a major rupture with the past occurred (as during the period after the fall of the monarchy because of the French Revolution, or with the demise of apartheid in South Africa before the elections of 1994 took place), a new basis of legitimacy has to be created by the only and ultimate source of authority, namely, the people itself. The major interests in Palestinian society, those that have kept life going, from the trade unions, to health workers, teachers, farmers, lawyers, doctors, in addition to all the many NGOs must now become the basis on which Palestinian reform -- despite Israel's incursions and the occupation -- is to be constructed. It seems to me useless to wait for Arafat, or Europe, or the US, or the Arabs to do this: it must absolutely be done by Palestinians themselves by way of a Constituent Assembly that contains in it all the major elements of Palestinian society. Only such a group, constructed by the people themselves and not by the remnants of the Oslo dispensation, certainly not by the shabby fragments of Arafat's discredited Authority, can hope to succeed in re-organising society from the ruinous, indeed catastrophically incoherent condition in which it is to be found. The basic job for such an Assembly is to construct an emergency system of order that has two purposes. One, to keep Palestinian life going in an orderly way with full participation for all concerned. Two, to choose an emergency executive committee whose mandate is to end the occupation, not negotiate with it. It is quite obvious that militarily we are no match for Israel. Kalishnikoffs are not effective weapons when the balance of power is so lopsided. What is needed is a creative method of struggle that mobilises all the human resources at our disposal to highlight, isolate and gradually make untenable the main aspects of Israeli occupation e.g., settlements, settlement roads, roadblocks and house demolitions. The present group around Arafat is hopelessly incapable of thinking of, much less implementing, such a strategy: it is too bankrupt, too bound up in corrupt selfish practices, too burdened with the failures of the past.

For such a Palestinian strategy to work there has to be an Israeli component made up of individuals and groups with whom a common basis of struggle against occupation can

and indeed must be established. This is the great lesson of the South African struggle: that it proposed the vision of a multi-racial society from which neither individuals nor groups and leaders were ever deflected. The only vision coming out of Israel today is violence, forcible separation and the continued subordination of Palestinians to an idea of Jewish supremacy. Not every Israeli believes in these things of course, but it must be up to us to project the idea of co-existence in two states that have natural relations with each other on the basis of sovereignty and equality. Mainstream Zionism has still not been able to produce such a vision, so it must come from the Palestinian people and their new leaders whose new legitimacy has to be constructed now, at a moment when everything is crashing down and everyone is anxious to re-make Palestine in his own image and according to his own ideas.

We have never faced a worse, or at the same time, a more seminal moment. The Arab order is in total disarray; the US administration is effectively controlled by the Christian Right and the Israeli lobby (within 24 hours, everything that George Bush seems to have agreed with President Mubarak was reversed by Sharon's visit); and our society has been nearly wrecked by poor leadership and the insanity of thinking that suicide bombing will lead directly to an Islamic Palestinian state. There is always hope for the future, but one has to be able to look for it and find it in the right place. It is quite clear that in the absence of any serious Palestinian or Arab information policy in the United States (especially in the Congress) we cannot for a moment delude ourselves that Powell and Bush are about to set a real agenda for Palestinian rehabilitation. That's why I keep saying that the effort must come from us, by us, for us. I'm at least trying to suggest a different avenue of approach. Who else but the Palestinian people can construct the legitimacy they need to rule themselves and fight the occupation with weapons that don't kill innocents and lose us more support than ever before? A just cause can easily be subverted by evil or inadequate or corrupt means. The sooner this is realised the better the chance we have to lead ourselves out of the present impasse. Edward Said

Film Review

The Navigators

Directed by Ken Loach, written by Rob Dawber

Reviewed by Janet Burstall

The Navigators charts the lives of the workers at one railway depot in Sheffield.

Harpic, the manager, is greeted with derision by the workers when he introduces the new mission statement and promotional film for the new rail track maintenance company in Sheffield. *The Navigators* charts the journey from the first stages of corporatisation, all the way to privatisation, with jibes, jokes and deadly seriousness.

It is a story of the slow degradation of lives, a skilful telling of the big picture story through the small story of the workers at one railway yard, five of them, in particular. Permanent jobs disappear as redundancies are offered, then taken to pay bills, debts. Once redundant, the railway workers take day work from an agency, that withholds work from anyone who complains about safety being ignored.

The pressures, which lead some of the workers to take these decisions, are shown in their family relationships. One is having his pay docked by the Child Support Agency. Another's wife is fed up with having him hanging around the house, after he loses work for making a safety complaint. He is forced to return to the agency to beg for work, promising not to make trouble.

Arguments against management's inexorable push are made, small acts of resistance are more designed to protest and impede than to stop the whole project.

I watched the movie with two teenagers. They said it was "boring", had no climax. In fact, it has a very intense climax, but the intensity is entirely moral and emotional: there are no loud noises, special effects or stunts. Ken Loach's style of movie making is naturalistic, many people speak at once, multi-directional microphones are used, thick Yorkshire accents and colloquial local dialogue are evident. It has to be the unfamiliar style that the teenagers found hard, and perhaps the ordinariness of the lives, the routine of daily working life, is not the stuff of movies shown at Hoyts and Greater Union. Has the big money movie industry imposed a big budget style on cinema that makes anything low budget and more real, seem out of date, old-fashioned?

The Navigators is not about a successful fight against privatisation, because that would be a lie — the railways in Britain were privatised. It is not even about organising to resist the privatisation and losing, since in the absence of an articulated and convincing strategy to win, it could only show resistance as doomed. It is about the doom that is the consequence of privatisation: poverty, damaged relationships, physical danger and above all moral decay, social disintegration. It is a story about the necessity of resistance.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* review of *The Navigators* said, "the message — that privatisation of public services has a human cost — is undermined by its sledgehammer politics." That's one perspective. On the other hand, French railway workers approved so much that at a special screening they gave Ken Loach a standing ovation and a Paris St Germain football shirt with his name on the back!

It is sad that Rob Dawber, the script writer, was not there for such an inspiring reception. He died of mesothelioma, contracted from handling asbestos on the railways.

Rob fought his illness for well over two years, defying a prognosis of six months to live. He saw the fine cut of the film just before he died. His family accepted his BAFTA (British Film Industry) Craft Award for Best New Writer in 2001. Rob was a socialist, a member of Workers' Liberty in Britain, and only weeks before he died, he nominated for pre-selection as a Socialist Alliance candidate. Rob's legacy is a powerful movie which should be seen by all workers who are facing corporatisation and privatisation. From it, they will be able to see the future they face if they do not find the will and means to resist.

The Navigators opens in Australia from 8 August, and screens at Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane Film Festivals.

Book Review

The New Rulers of the World, by John Pilger, London, Verso, 2002.

Reviewed by Ronald F. Price

Pilger opens this collection of previous, now revised, essays with an apt comparison of the US Government's threat of a fifty-year 'war on terrorism' with George Orwell's book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell wrote in a world dominated by three slogans: "war is peace", "freedom is slavery", and "ignorance is strength". Pilger comments: "Today's slogan, 'war on terrorism', also reverses meaning. The war is terrorism."

Pilger's four essays are devoted to Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Aborigines of Australia. It is a tale of exploitation, political deceit, massacres of innocent people and the failure of a majority of people in the wealthy capitalist countries to understand what is happening and to oppose it. Pilger's account of Indonesia begins with General Suharto's 'severance pay', upon resignation, of \$15 billion, and the sweatshops which ring Jakarta, the workers of which make for a pittance the clothes which reap profits for firms in the West. He goes on to remind us of the support for the bloody dictator, given by politicians ranging from Margaret Thatcher to Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. He describes the elimination of President Sukarno and the CIA-supported murders which eliminated a whole generation which might have established a more humane and democratic Indonesia.

His chapter on Iraq brings to life the suffering of the ordinary people as a result of US policy: the dramatic increase in cancer, and the birth of deformed children following the use of depleted uranium by the USA in the Gulf War; the suffering and death caused by the denial of medical supplies in a policy which Denis Halliday, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, does not hesitate to call genocide. He reminds us that Saddam Hussein resulted from CIA policy and was favoured by the USA and Britain as long as his brutal regime promised to further their imperialist policies.

Pilger's third chapter begins with a quotation from US strategic planner, George Kennan, who, in 1948, said that in order to maintain the country's dominant economic position, would have to, "cease thinking about human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization". It goes on to illustrate how this policy has been brutally effected in Vietnam, Laos, and most recently in Afghanistan. Britain's role as arms exporter to various reactionary regimes is also described, Tony Blair's Government being shown to be worse even than its Tory predecessors.

In his final chapter, Pilger returns to his home country, Australia, and describes in moving terms the situation of its Aboriginal peoples. Cynically used when it suits its Government — as during the Sydney Olympics — it is a tale of neglect and worse. At the same time, Pilger reminds us of the positive achievements of the Australian labour movement in the past: the world's first thirty-five hour week, half a century before Europe or America; the winning of the world's first minimum wage, child benefits, pensions and the vote for women. While helping to inform us and to guide our emotions, the book is also a reminder of a major problem

which we, as socialists, face. We need to understand why so many politicians, academics and journalists in different countries, and not just in the West, choose to deny or ignore the facts like those Pilger describes. Having understood that, we might be better able to find ways, before it is too late, of

rallying people for the offensive which is required to fulfil the dreams for a humane world which have inspired socialists down the centuries

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Know the enemy

Know the enemy, or at least have some idea what the bosses are up to, by subscribing to Bosswatch, <http://bosswatch.labor.net.au> a website of the NSW Labor Council.

These items from the 19 June Bosswatch should rouse some anger against the capitalist class.

There are more millionaires than ever before, according to a new global survey of the world's richest.

Millionaires On The Rise

More good news for the top end of town, with a global report showing the number of millionaires around the world grew last year to 7.1 million despite the global economic downturn and difficult financial market. The 2002 World Wealth Report, published this week by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young and Merrill Lynch found that 200,000 individuals joined the ranks of the wealthy in 2001. But the authors of the study said it was clear that the 3 per cent increase in the number of millionaires represented a slowdown from prior years - poor ducks. The United States accounted for 2.1 million of the millionaires, or nearly 30 per cent of the total, the survey found. There were 100,000 high net worth individuals in Australia at the end of 2001, up slightly compared to the previous year. (Source: The Australian)

NAB Forks Out For Homeside Trio

Amongst the group of winners were three sacked National Australia Bank executives who last year took the blame for more than \$3.6 billion in losses from its HomeSide debacle have walked away with a \$8.3 million in termination payments from Australia's biggest bank. NAB chairman Charles says the payments were "a necessary step" in resolving outstanding matters related to the disastrous mortgages arm, whose operating assets were sold in December to Washington Mutual. NAB is not the first Australian company that has signed lucrative contracts to match US pay scales, only to have worn big costs when severing ties with those executives. Lend Lease last year paid \$15 million after parting with US real estate investment boss Sheryl Pressler after just a year, while AMP paid a total of \$13.2 million to its departing chief executive George Trumbull in 1999. (Source: SMH)

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According to the Pakistani Labour Party the recent referendum which guaranteed Musharraf the Presidency for a further five years was a complete sham, with the majority of the electorate boycotting the poll. National Assembly elections are due in October. War talk over Kashmir is an obvious populist ploy for unpopular politicians to boost their ratings. Musharraf must also soothe his fellow generals, who will not want compromise over Kashmir. It looks as if Musharraf is playing a balancing role between the military and civilian political forces and Pakistan's international allies. The US and the UK will want stability in the region above all else. In the UK's case they want a market for Harrier jets and the like, uncomplicated by the pressure to take sides between India and Pakistan. What of the rights of the Kashmiris?

Neither Pakistan nor India can lay claims to "ownership" of Kashmir. National boundaries in the sub-continent are quite arbitrary — it is a patchwork of regional, ethnic, tribal and religious entities. Kashmir is such a patchwork in itself — a Muslim majority with a large Hindu minority and a smaller but geographically distinct Buddhist minority as well as a Sikh minority. Nonetheless very many Kashmiris, probably a majority, to the desire for independence.

Before 1947 Kashmir was a "princely state" — its destiny in the hands of its aristocratic Hindu ruler, Hari Singh. In 1947, Kashmir could have joined up with Pakistan or India, or it could have declared independence. The newly created Muslim confessional state of Pakistan wanted to incorporate "Muslim Kashmir" and dominate the north of the continent. Pashtun tribes from Pakistan invaded Kashmir in October 1947, and Hari Singh turned to India, allowing it to annex Kashmir. In 1949, the UN negotiated a "Line of Control". Some of the north-west territories of Kashmir (population is now 2.5 million) were given to Pakistan but these have never been fully incorporated into Pakistan. Most of the rest of Kashmir (population now 8 million), including the fertile vale of Kashmir, was given to India. India promised to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir to decide its future but this has never been held.

India and Pakistan fought another seventeen-day war in 1965. In 1972, the "Line of Control" was renegotiated. Some of historical Kashmir is in China. In 1999, a brief, very violent, clash took place in the territory when Pakistani-backed forces infiltrated the Indian-controlled state. At the time of partition a minority of Kashmiris would have been pro-Pakistan and supported the main Pakistani party, the Muslim League. However the majority would have backed Sheikh Abdullah, a secular nationalist (albeit one who was often ambivalent on the question of independence). In the early '50s, Abdullah, who headed a state government in Kashmir, began to be more critical of India who had promised the region a "special status" within the Indian union, but failed to deliver. When Abdullah began talks with the Pakistani Government he was arrested. This started a way of life for him — of arrests, trials, imprisonments, releases, defiance by him and further arrests — which went on right up until the '70s. Thus, the Kashmiri nationalist movement was suppressed by the Indians.

At the end of the '80s, Kashmiri resistance changed. Although there had been a secular nationalist armed group since 1965, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (as it was later known), was now being challenged by Islamist armed groups. Their objective was sometimes the same — complete independence. But some also wanted unification

with Pakistan. This escalation in resistance was preceded by an increase in Indian state repression. Rajiv Gandhi, as Prime Minister in India, abolished the state's own government during the '80s and put his own appointed governor in charge. Abdullah's successor as leader of the most mainstream secular nationalists, the National Conference — his son Farooq — unfortunately wanted to cooperate with the Indian regime. Farooq lost a lot of support. A political vacuum was thereby created, into which the Islamists could step.

India responded to the armed resistance with brutal repression which has not really abated. 30,000 people, on all sides, have died in Kashmir in the last eleven years. House to house searches, arbitrary killings by the army, rapes and tortures have been reported by human rights groups. Human rights abuses on the Pakistani side have also been reported. Such abuse has predicably led to the growth of the Islamist groups, who are now probably the strongest element in the Kashmiri resistance. Where Islamist groups flourish there will be attacks on the more secular, more "moderate" people: this month one of the leaders of the All Party Hurriyat Conference (an umbrella group which includes some of the more secular nationalists as well as some Islamists) was assassinated by a jihadi group. India promises fresh elections in Kashmir soon and a new "clean" regime in the country. This is an important part no doubt of the Indian Government's calculations. Indeed Kashmiri elections during the 90s were all heavily boycotted.

In Kashmir the issue is one of "self-determination". Socialists support that completely, despite the political coloration of part of the Kashmiri independence movement. We should have no truck with the jihadi groups, but solidarise with the secular groups. We also have to be clear that "self-determination" is not straightforward. If a plebiscite were held today in the territories and the majority wanted independence — as seems likely — and that was the only thing on offer, it would not amount to self-determination for many Kashmiris. Not those who want to be part of Pakistan. Or the Hindu and Buddhist minorities who want to be part of India. Those minorities ought to have rights in any political settlement — perhaps some federal autonomy and confederal ties with the larger states.

Certainly no free and fair plebiscite could be held while Indian and Pakistani armies are in Kashmir. The troops should get out now and the Indian and Pakistani states should leave the people to decide their fate. We stand on the brink of war in the region because of the dreadful political circumstances in Pakistan and India. A war between the two states, even with conventional weapons, would result an appalling waste of life. It would of course be complete disaster on an unimaginable scale if nuclear weapons were used. We need an urgent labour movement campaign to put pressure on both sides in this conflict to back off. We cannot trust our own Government in this matter — a government which can rule out an arms embargo even as we stand on the brink of nuclear war. A government with a Defence Minister like Geoff Hoon, who goes on TV just to brag about how he would use nuclear arms, "if necessary".

In the long run only a working-class alternative, one that organises for the unity of working people in the Indian sub-continent, can find a solution. We can help by making solidarity with the peace movement in India. And making solidarity with the working-class opposition — groups like the Pakistani Labour Party — to military-Islamist rule in Pakistan.

Workers' Liberty

India-Pakistan:

No war! Self-determination for Kashmir

Cathy Nugent

The threat of war between Pakistan and India over disputed territory in Kashmir has been building since December 2001, when Kashmiri armed fighters attacked the Indian parliament, killing 14 people. At that time the Indian Government demanded the military government of General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan act decisively against Kashmiri “terrorists”.

In mid-May, after an attack by a Islamic jihadi group on an army base in Indian-occupied Kashmir, in which 30 people were killed, the Indian Government became more belligerent still. Prime Minister Vajpayee talked of wining a “decisive battle” against Pakistan. He said Musharraf is not doing enough against the jihadi groups operating in Kashmir.

War now looks both an imminent and a frightening prospect. After December 2001, both India and Pakistan increased their numbers of troops guarding the “Line of Control”, the border which separates Pakistani-controlled Azad Kashmir and the Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir state. An estimated one million troops are now in the area. Pakistan has just completed a series of tests on its nuclear missiles. Neither India nor Pakistan will rule out the use of nuclear weapons.

When Musharraf says he cannot guarantee that Kashmiri “militants” will stop their campaign, he is possibly telling the truth. Many of these groups are Islamist-jihadists. Although nurtured by the Pakistani secret service (Inter Services Intelligence/ISI), they will pursue their goals independently. Like those other “holy warriors” once backed by Pakistan, the Taliban, they will not willingly compromise. On the other hand, it is true that Musharraf has not, for his own reasons, yet employed the very considerable repressive capacity of the Pakistani state against the Islamists.

Kashmir has been a focus for Indian and Pakistani rivalry since Indian independence and partition in 1947. These countries have gone to war over the territory three times — in 1947-8, 1972 and in 1999 — with many skirmishes in between. The political climate after 11 September has given a new dimension to the historic conflict. The Indian Government’s claim to the moral high-ground on the issue of “terrorism” is obscenely hypocritical: it has used unbridled state terrorism against the Kashmiri people and it backs “counter-insurgency” groups in Kashmir. Still, the US-led “war on terrorism” has given India leverage to press their claims against Pakistan and they have used it shamelessly. Moreover the political climate makes the prospect of war more likely.

Pakistan and India’s conflicts over Kashmir have always had next to nothing to do with the wishes of the Kashmiri people. Both regional powers have tried to thwart the Kashmiri independence movement. Governments of both these regional powers have used Kashmir as safety valves for domestic troubles. And such troubles lie behind the conflict in 2002.

India’s ruling party, the Hindu-chauvinist BJP, got poor results in recent state elections. It has been criticised for its handling of pogroms against Muslims in Gujarat this year in which 2000 were killed. Attacking the Muslim state is a “safer” way for them to pander to Hindu chauvinism.

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