

Workers' Liberty



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

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Socialist Alliance

Next stop left unity?

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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 only the working class liberating itself can achieve socialism, 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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Towards a new workers' party

Workers' Liberty has been arguing that the Socialist Alliance needs to become much more than an electoral alliance if it is to succeed at enlarging and mobilising support for working-class socialist politics. From its very founding we argued for a platform for the Socialist Alliance that is far more than a set of dot points derived from current political campaigns. We have argued for the Socialist Alliance to commit itself to a socialism that is nothing like the socialism of the old USSR, but to socialism based on production publicly owned and democratically managed by workers and the community. We have argued for the Socialist Alliance to be a voice for working-class struggle, the struggle out of which socialism can be created. During the formation of the Alliance we argued for a democratic Alliance which would encourage open discussion of ideas about socialism, in the pages of the Alliance's own websites, email discussions, and broadsheet. More recently we have put the case for the Socialist Alliance to work towards deeper left unity, and specifically we have made concrete proposals for mobilising the membership to build rank-and-file militant caucuses in unions and a serious attitude to union work.

Now the DSP leadership has announced its intention to propose to the DSP conference in December that the DSP should operate as an internal tendency of the Socialist Alliance and negotiate for the SA to take "as much of the political and organisational assets we have built up through the DSP into the Socialist Alliance as is possible". Workers' Liberty welcomes the DSP's new allocation of resources to the Socialist Alliance. This opens up new possibilities which could see the Alliance make great strides forward. Our proposals for the Alliance now gain greater immediate relevance.

We propose that at its May conference the Alliance should commit itself to:

- a more comprehensive class struggle platform;
- a publication that can support the Alliance in becoming a party rather than a federation;
- developing joint work, at least in unions, campaigns and on campus, and;
- a new constitution to support moves from an electoral alliance to a working-class socialist party, and to guarantee free and unfettered discussion of political issues.

Platform

We take political agreement seriously, and the political basis for left unity very seriously. The DSP argue that more substantial political agreement than currently exists as per the SA platform has been demonstrated in practice. This agreement "in practice" falls a long way short of being a basis for a cohesive and consciously committed SA membership. A clear conscious political agreement must be the basis for unity, not an organisational swamping that might force out other left groups without political clarity.

Workers' Liberty will be renewing proposals for a more comprehensive and explicitly working-class and socialist platform for the SA, to be debated up to and at the May

2003 SA conference. We propose that the platform of the SA as a party should include:

a commitment to socialism as the creation of the working class, self-organised in struggle, overthrowing the power of capital, and democratically managing production; linking our aim of socialism to the present by basing ourselves on support for working-class struggle; a platform that translates into perspectives for the SA to put forward how the union movement and campaigns can win reforms and demands, and that moves the SA beyond the rituals of protest politics.

Publication

We propose that the Alliance develop a publication that is both agitational and has space to address deeper theoretical issues. It must guarantee space for all points of view within the Alliance and the editorial board composition must reflect the variety of the opinions in the Alliance. We are for the Alliance to commence its own weekly publication from the May conference onwards, once there has been time to consider and discuss the editorial policy and nature of the weekly publication.

Campaigning and branches

We propose that the SA should proceed to immediately discuss the only concrete proposals for developing a unified approach to trade union work that have been put forward, that is, the trade union work proposal of Workers' Liberty comrades.

We are also concerned that the DSP (and some others in the Alliance) take a sectarian attitude to the labour movement, especially the ALP, seeking unnecessary organisational splits from the ALP rather than organising support for a socialist platform throughout the labour movement. We also propose that SA branches should be encouraged to shift their emphasis from organisational details to political discussion and education.

Constitution

We propose that the constitution of the SA should provide for increased accountability of elected bodies, rights of recall, guaranteed representation on elected bodies for minority viewpoints and methods for making constitutional changes. All tendencies within the Alliance are currently guaranteed the right to organise as caucuses. Additional provision should be made for guaranteeing caucuses or tendencies within the Alliance, such as the right to publish and distribute their own material openly and freely.

Whatever the DSP's motives, the Alliance has to date operated on a comradely and democratic basis, and DSP comrades have carried a significant workload in the Alliance. There are hundreds of non-aligned members, many of whom are relatively inactive, but many of who could be mobilised and enthused at the prospect of the Alliance becoming a more effective political force. We look forward to the immediate opening of a vigorous discussion on the way forward for left unity and the development of working-class socialist politics and to the May 2003 Socialist Alliance conference taking some bold steps towards these goals.

Big changes posed for Socialist Alliance

Martin Thomas

Workers' Liberty welcomes the Democratic Socialist Party's move towards "a radically bigger commitment towards left unity within the Socialist Alliance".

We wrote in WL24: "The Socialist Alliance needs to develop towards being a united and democratic socialist party, with a much fuller, more comprehensive programme, 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". We are willing to reorganise ourselves so that we operate as a Workers' Liberty tendency within the Socialist Alliance, rather than an independent organisation, and we hope other groups will do likewise.

Why unity?

To emancipate itself, the working class must reorganise itself and reorient itself intellectually. The working class does that through mass struggles. But it cannot do it just by improvisation. It requires the initiating and educative contribution of a working-class socialist party - a body of activists who organise consistently overtime even prior to the mass struggles, who are "the memory of the class", and who, over time, develop a coherent socialist world-view and strategy.

The existing diverse small socialist groups make some initiating and educative contribution. But the full contribution necessary cannot be made by a scattering of small groups. It requires a strong party, uniting at least the majority of the most committed political activists.

The big political differences between the groups, rooted in the troubled 20th century history of socialism and Stalinism, are important. No working-class socialist party with the necessary clarity and incisiveness can be built

without resolving or transcending those differences. That can be done only through intense debate, coupled, of course, with experience.

The divisions and conflicts between the groups therefore have a real basis. To try to transcend them simply by declaring unity, administratively, and making an administrative decision to deal with those differences by blurring them over or by snap majority vote, is impossible, and would achieve nothing solid if by some quirk it even became possible.

The differences are real, the different views are passionately held. If we, as socialists, are not passionate and even quarrelsome about our ideas, we can achieve nothing. Any such administrative unity of small groups can command little weight or authority with activists compared to the chance to take their passionate convictions to the wider working-class public.

Administrative unity cannot take us forward; nor can continued division. Competing small groups seek and develop different milieus, styles, and activities which allow each of them to find a niche. The big political differences become overlaid by differences of habit and idiom, clan loyalties, and secondary tactical disputes. Possibilities for collaboration where differences are only small are lost. Serious debate on the big differences withers because it lacks the common culture, the common framework of respect created by practical collaboration, which can make that possible.

The way out is a common drive for maximum collaboration where there is agreement; willingness to compromise on secondary issues for the sake of that collaboration; and clear and patient debate on the important differences.

Always to seek maximum unity and dialogue; never just to "agree to disagree", but always to strive to clarify the big issues among the activist left; always to reassess alignments as changing events create new opportunities and put old differences in a new light, with the onus of proof always on those who want to maintain division and separation - those are the rules we propose.

That is why we came in to the Socialist Alliance. And, now, the Socialist Alliance cannot continue as just an electoral coalition. Elections are not the be-all and end-all of politics. To run in elections with no greater aim than to scrape a few votes is pointless. But, without some broader and more active unity, what follow-up can we propose to those who are convinced by the ideas that we argue at election time and want to act on them?

How?

Thus we welcome the DSP's move, and agree with some of their reasoning. The Socialist Alliance should move towards more unity, and more activity. We need to discuss how that is done.

In "Left-Wing Communism", Lenin wrote:

"Would it not be better if the salutations addressed to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks were more frequently accompanied by a profound analysis of the reasons why the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?"

"As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the entire period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and

maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.

"The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced?"

"First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and - if you wish - merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people - primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct.

"Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning.

"On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement."

Of course Lenin did not mean that no socialist organisation could be disciplined until it became a mass party; but his essential point, relevant to us, was that real party discipline, not sectish "phrasemongering and clowning", can be developed only in line with an organisation's growing activity, debate, and political life. It is not an administrative matter.

The "iron discipline" he wrote of meant something different to him and the Bolsheviks from what it may seem to mean to us, who read his words through the lens of 70-odd years' experience of Stalinism. The Bolsheviks were "iron-disciplined" by comparison with the old social-democratic parties where parliamentarians, editors, and trade-union leaders could easily flout the wishes of the working-class rank-and-file, or by comparison with some early Communist Parties where anarchistic ideas were influential, but they were radically democratic. According to Lenin in 1907, "The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and free freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings". Even under the duress of civil war, dissidents within the Bolshevik Party took it for granted that they had the right to argue their views vigorously and publicly.

That is the sort of regime we operate among ourselves in Workers' Liberty. Over the decades since Lenin wrote, however, Stalinist notions of "Leninism" have seeped even into the anti-Stalinist left. The conventional cod-Leninist regime is one where all party members are obliged to pretend in public that they agree with the majority, or leadership, line, whether they do or not; where party

members can challenge the leadership's views only internally and, often, only in prescribed preconference discussion periods; and, often also, members of the leading committees are obliged to pretend before the rank and file that they agree with the committee majority even when they do not. The DSP has that sort of regime. *Green Left Weekly*, to its credit, allows space for debate with socialists outside the DSP; but differences within the DSP, which must exist, are never argued out in its columns.

To extend that cod-Leninist regime to the Socialist Alliance would bring not unity but disruption. Even when the Socialist Alliance has become a fully-fledged party, it should provide for public debate and dissent, within the framework of "unity of definite actions". The Alliance can become a fully-fledged party, with a collective leadership which has over time earned authority and trust, only through a process of political growth, not by administrative decree. In the next period, therefore, the Alliance should not adopt even a liberal "democratic centralism", but a more flexible form of coordination which allows tendencies and groups within it to act autonomously where they find it necessary so long as they do not obstruct actions decided by the majority.

Politics

John Percy's letter on behalf of the DSP states that the Alliance has already developed, in fact if not formally, "a consensus around a principled class-struggle approach to international and Australian politics".

We have no wish to undervalue the real advances in left unity made by the Alliance. John's claim, however, radically overestimates what has already been achieved, and therefore radically underestimates what we still have to do. The Socialist Alliance has had a consensus sufficient for the sort of loose, low-temperature operation we have had so far, but not for a more vigorous, ambitious operation.

For example, John mentions Palestine as a point of consensus. Not really. Workers' Liberty is for the right to national self-determination of both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews ("two states") as part of a programme for a socialist united states of the Middle East. We condemn the Hamas suicide bombings of Israeli civilians. The ISO desires "no compromise with Zionism", i.e. it wants Israel ("the hijack state", "America's watchdog in the Middle East") destroyed - notionally to be replaced by a "secular democratic" Arab state covering the territory of former British Mandate Palestine, though in fact no state resulting from an Arab conquest of Israel would conceivably be democratic. It prides itself on not condemning the Hamas suicide bombers. The DSP supports "two states" as an interim measure towards creating a single "secular democratic" state in the territory of former British Mandate Palestine. The broad sympathy for the Palestinians which all these positions do of course have in common is adequate "consensus" only for very limited, low-temperature activity on the Palestine issue. And union disaffiliation from the Labor Party? That was a major point of dispute before our first Socialist Alliance conference. Workers' Liberty is against disaffiliation; in the current structure and relation of forces in the labour movement, it amounts to more militant unions hiving off from broad working-class politics. The ISO agrees, with some nuances of difference. The DSP completely disagrees, arguing that

the unions' link to the ALP is the fount and origin of their servility and sluggishness in class struggle.

At that first Socialist Alliance conference a sort of "consensus" was reached by the DSP withdrawing its motion in favour of disaffiliation. We appreciate the responsible attitude shown by the DSP then. But the DSP has not changed its views; nor should it until it is convinced. We do not have consensus. All we have so far is, in effect, an agreement to tag that issue for further discussion. In the run-up to the first Socialist Alliance there was debate about the need for the Alliance to explain what it means by socialism. We argued that the Alliance should expound a positive, democratic, libertarian concept of socialism, distinguishing it sharply and explicitly from the old "actually existing socialism". We do not have consensus on that.

The DSP believes that Cuba is an imperfect but nonetheless real model of socialism; we, and others, believe that Cuba is an exploitative class society, its regime certainly less vicious than the old USSR but nonetheless one in which the working class is deprived of all rights to organise and express itself collectively and independently. No consensus there yet.

And then there are the current differences within the Alliance on refugee campaigning. We believe that consensus is possible in this area, given serious discussion, and have made proposals to that end; but the consensus does not exist yet.

As the Alliance moves on to a higher level of united activity, differences which can be skated over now will become hot, controversial issues. That is not necessarily a bad thing. Intellectual progress is rarely made without some conflict and anger. But we should not think we can just surf onto the beach of unity by riding the wave of a consensus already established.

We need first a deliberate, planned raising of the level of political life and discussion in the Socialist Alliance; secondly, an ongoing process of selecting issues which can be thrashed out towards a majority vote.

Of course we do not need unity on all issues for a united party. In principle we, Workers' Liberty, would be willing to live as a minority tendency in a party which had taken majority decisions contrary to our ideas on Palestine, on disaffiliation, on Cuba, on refugee campaigning, and several other issues too. We might be a rather stumpy and un-docile minority tendency, but not so much so that the majority could not live with us, either.

That sort of cooperation-with-conflict, though, presupposes more than just a general agreement that unity is desirable. To make it possible a party has to develop a sense of solidarity, common cause, and common pride in the party's record and achievements, shaped in many struggles; a wide confidence in the membership about its democratic guarantees; and an open collective leadership which enjoys authority and trust. None of those preconditions can be decreed. They must be developed and won in political struggles, over time. What we have done in the Alliance so far towards developing those preconditions is good, but very limited.

Our conclusion, in brief: the good and positive process of moving the Alliance towards a higher level of unity and activity will be aborted if it is done administratively. The

DSP comrades obviously have a right to push their views on all the disputed questions at the next Socialist Alliance conference, to mobilise their numbers for that conference, and to try to win. Where the rest of us disagree with them, our main answer must be to mobilise our resources for the debate, rather than pleading with them to hold off. But the Alliance must also insist that the vote-taking on disputed questions should not outrun the discussion. If it does - if there is too administrative a push to unity - then we will get not unity but disruption.

If the DSP dissolves itself as a party, the DSP comrades will have a natural desire to reconstruct what they have lost - the advantages of a full "party" organisation as compared to just a politico-ideological tendency - at the level of the Alliance. Fair enough. But resistance from the non-DSP is fair enough, too. The Alliance can and must mount fierce resistance to any attempts to "DSP-ise" the Alliance administratively by pushing for too-quick vote-outs on not-sufficiently-debated certain issues; it must tell the DSP that there will still be certain of their purposes that it can pursue only as a tendency, and not by bending the structures of the Alliance to those purposes.

Positive steps

We suggest:

Immediate moves towards much more extensive collective trade-union work by the Socialist Alliance, as in proposals we have already made.

A programme of discussions about extending common Socialist Alliance work to other areas, refugee campaigning for one.

An immediate increase in the level of political discussion in the Alliance. Local Alliances should organise educationals and day schools as well as meetings about current topics. The different schools of thought in the Alliance should map out now the big political issues they want to put up for debate at the next Alliance conference, and start discussion on them.

Discussions on a constitution for a more unified Alliance. This constitution should explicitly entrench the right for tendencies or platforms to operate within the Alliance, to publish their views and - at this stage, at least - their right to act autonomously where there is not sufficient consensus, so long as they do not obstruct the Alliance's majority-decided actions.

Discussions on common Socialist Alliance publications. We are for a common Socialist Alliance paper. Alongside it, the Alliance should allow for the circulation of tendency magazines and bulletins - just as in and around the Scottish Socialist Party, *Workers' Liberty*, *Solidarity*, *Socialism Today*, *Socialist Review*, *Weekly Worker*, *Republican Communist* and *Frontline* circulate as well as the SSP paper *Scottish Socialist Voice*.

It will be a great help to the Alliance if the DSP is willing to put the large assets of *Green Left Weekly* into such a paper. It cannot, however, just be a matter of GLW being declared to be the paper of the Alliance. That would be administrative unity.

The Alliance must have its own paper, with its own name and its own way of operating, its own editorial board, and its own rules which establish both the right to controversy inside the paper and the obligation to focus the paper's front-page agitation on themes and policies where there is large consensus.

The Alliance needs a paper with much more "weight" than *Scottish Socialist Voice* (which is deliberately designed as a "mass" paper, with very short articles, short sentences, short words, and therefore, extremely limited room for debate among socialists). We may also need an Alliance discussion magazine.

Two final points

The ISO. Workers' Liberty is willing to reorganise as a tendency inside the Socialist Alliance. We hope the ISO will be willing to do that too. For them, however, with a larger "party" apparatus than ours, that is a more difficult decision. The ISO should not be steamrolled or given ultimatums. To push the Alliance to greater "unity" at the cost of excluding the ISO would make more haste, less speed.

DSP assets. John Percy's letter talks about taking the "political and organisational assets" of the DSP into the Alliance. The DSP has other assets too, of course: real estate, funds, a team of full-time employees. It will be good if those can be brought into the Alliance. However, the only way that can be done - unless the Alliance is to be "DSP-ised" very quickly and administratively, or the DSP comrades go for a degree of self-abnegation which none of us can realistically ask of them - is step by step, by consultation and agreement, with, probably, a large part of those assets remaining the property of the Democratic Socialist tendency rather than the Alliance for a good long while to come.

We need to avoid a Yugoslavia. The first Yugoslav state, created after World War 1, originated with a genuine desire by representative Croatian nationalists to have a unified South-Slav state together with the Serbs. The Croats had ideas and ambitions - but no "apparatus". The "apparatus" of the unified state was entirely that of the already-established Serbian monarchy. For the average Croat, "unity" meant only the Serbian army and the Serbian tax-collector. The idea of south-Slav unity quickly soured.

A "united" Alliance whose "apparatus" is almost entirely a DSP one will not work. We "Croats of the Alliance" must insist on large federal-type guarantees for the Alliance - just as such guarantees were necessary for any democratic south-Slav-unity policy.

Riki Lane reports from Melbourne Socialist Alliance

Socialist Alliance (SA) members held a lively and frank discussion on the future of SA at the International Socialist Organisation's Marxism conference. One theme that almost all participants agreed on was the need to develop joint work in unions and campaigns.

Dick Nichols, from the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) outlined the DSP's proposals and why they raised them now. This is because:

1. SA is underperforming in relation to its potential;
2. The DSP needs to have a proper discussion amongst its members - despite popular cliches; the DSP is not a top down organisation where the members do what they are told;

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3. We need a thorough and clarifying debate in the lead up to the May conference. Issues like the constitution and asset transfers need to be worked out.

He argued that socialists usually say that the best way to build the socialist cause is to strengthen our own organisations, but that is not the case now. There are possibilities to connect with possibly hundreds of working-class militants, sick of the ALP, and thousands of anti-capitalist activists.

Workers' Liberty sees this quite differently. We think that building the working-class movement is primary for socialists and that building our own organisations has to serve that goal. The common obsession with "building the party" as the solution to all questions has been a major problem. We welcome this shift by the DSP, but it is not just a question of special circumstances now.

Dick stressed that this is not a DSP takeover, nor are they trying to capitalise on divisions in other affiliates.

In summing up, Dick welcomed that the debate was off and running. He made four points:

1. There is no fait accompli, and the DSP are not rushing. The DSP only has 4/5 people on SA National Executive. SA has to make decisions through its processes;
2. Programme: the DSP will make a proposal for a platform that is written in accessible language to make explicit the real basis of political agreement;
3. What is a revolutionary programme? It cannot be decided in advance of construction of an organisation that can lead struggles;
- 4 DSP will support proposals for joint work. Differences should be openly discussed in SA, on the website etc.

Alison Thorne, from the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women (FSP/RW), stressed the need to celebrate, and start from, what SA has already achieved.

There is a need for a vibrant socialist electoral alternative, which the Greens cannot provide because they are not anti-capitalist.

We live in dangerous times, where democratic rights are being eroded. Leadership of the struggle to defend democratic rights needs at least equal priority in SA to election campaigning.

FSP/RW are for revolutionary regroupment. Programmatic matters are very important. FSP/RW are revolutionary socialist feminists, and do not want to be part of a radical labourite party.

SA is not a revolutionary organisation. Its development should not be rushed by the DSP.

She welcomed the discussion, which had clarified the issues.

Sue Johnson spoke for the International Socialist Organisation (ISO).

Her experience as candidate for Grayndler showed her that SA fills a political need. For the ISO, SA is as an electoral front.

There have been problems with SA. It has failed to make real roots in working-class communities and unions. It has been good on propaganda, poor on participation in grassroots local campaigns. It is a long-term project and will improve. It represents a step forward for the left.

The nature of the period demands examination of organisational forms. However, she agreed with Alex Callinicos that the differences between left groups now are not so much about theory, but how they respond to concrete political events.

The DSP proposal states much agreement there, so why do we have split campaigns in refugee and anti-war work in Sydney?

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) model, as referred to by the DSP and Workers' Liberty (WL), has been successful, but cannot automatically be transposed elsewhere. The specific circumstances in the Scottish labour movement made it possible.

The DSP letter poses a *fait accompli*. It is not for the DSP to decide when the transition period to a party starts.

WL agrees with Sue that the SA is weak in its participation in grassroots campaigns, and that this needs to be a priority. We also agree that the existence of two refugee campaigns in Sydney is a major problem that needs to be resolved.

We disagree with Callinicos. It is true that the disputes over practical issues - e.g. how to respond to Islamic fundamentalist dominated rallies in support of Palestinians - have the greatest potential to divide the left. But different approaches to concrete events are rooted in different theoretical approaches that have to be debated through.

While the SSP model cannot just be adopted, it offers a useful example of how to have various tendencies working together with freedom to publish their own views.

David Glanz (ISO) welcomed the debate and offered the pages of *Socialist Worker* for the discussion. The discussion needs to continue - e.g. at the upcoming Resistance conference.

The International Socialist Tendency (IST) has shown flexibility about organisational forms - e.g. in Zimbabwe they have worked in the bourgeois dominated Movement for Democratic Change, in Germany in the Socialist Youth, in Scotland in the SSP.

In discussions the IST has had with the Fourth International (FI), the FI have argued for broad-based workers' parties, while the IST wants mass revolutionary parties of the Bolshevik type.

The ISO will not be dissolving into a broad formation as it sees the need to maintain a revolutionary tendency.

Jonathan Sherlock (ISO) argued that the ISO and DSP disagree on what SA is. It is not a revolutionary party. It is a unique formation, like a united front, but not on a single issue. It is like Trotsky's idea of transitional demands.

He supported SA developing joint work in unions and campaigns - it needs to do more than electoral work.

Other ISO members argued that SA and revolutionary groups have different functions - SA is like a public outreach branch, or SA should aim to be a small mass centrist party.

WL thinks that the ISO approach of keeping the SA program to an essentially reformist minimum in order to maintain the support of reformist class-struggle activists is mistaken.

We need to flesh out a clear class struggle program, taking up the issues of all those oppressed under capitalism, which points out the need to get rid of the whole rotten system. This does not have to alienate serious class struggle militants who do not yet see the need, or possibility, of taking on capital as a whole.

Riki Lane (WL) said that WL welcomed the DSP's proposal and the discussion.

WL has supported SA being an activist party on a more extensive program from the start. A vital question is what will be the nature of this party - a revolutionary regroupment, or a class struggle working-class party with a multi-nucleated revolutionary core?

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We need to discuss the political basis for this party, including:

1. What is the vision of socialism - it should be nothing to do with Stalinism or seeing Cuba as a model;

2. How we relate to the ALP and the unions. This is the central question for in the Australian labour movement and there is as yet no agreement;

3. Following on from that is the centrality of a working-class orientation - giving priority to rank-and-file union organising and having a working class, *not* cross class, approach in campaigns.

We need to build political unity in theory and practice, not administrative unity.

The best way to proceed in building this party is to do it carefully and properly. Discuss the political program and develop joint work, especially in unions, on campus, in campaigns.

Carlene Wilson from Workers Power (WP) said that as a member of one of the smaller groups she was agnostic and felt as if she had a front row seat watching the blood flow.

She found worrying that any of the groups think they are *the* revolutionary nucleus from which a revolutionary party will grow.

WP does not want to build a halfway house, between reform and revolution - the working class needs a revolutionary party.

Melissa White reports from Brisbane Socialist Alliance

On 3 September, the Brisbane branch of the Socialist Alliance held its monthly meeting. The DSP used that opportunity to publicly announce its intentions to argue for the Socialist Alliance becoming an united party, in which the DSP would cease to be one affiliate amongst others and become an internal tendency within the Alliance. As part of outlining the practicalities of the next step in doing this, Jim McIlroy, speaking on behalf of the DSP, read from the DSP's letter of public announcement, emphasising the plan to dissolve DSP assets and turn over the *Green Left Weekly* to the Socialist Alliance by January if this proposal of the DSP's political committee is accepted by the broader membership at the DSP's conference in late December (which it very likely will be).

Far from being opposed to the general proposal of transforming the Socialist Alliance into a united socialist party, we were disturbed by one comment in particular that Jim made. Namely, that the DSP would seriously reconsider its commitment to the Socialist Alliance if the Socialist Alliance rejected its party proposal at conference in May.

Whilst this might have been an exaggerated or incautious statement of the DSP's intentions, we can't help but think that such an announcement does not get us off on the right foot for long-term political cooperation, and is not at all conducive to a free and unfettered discussion at the May conference. The groom shouldn't already be waiting at the altar, looking at his watch, before he's even proposed to his brides. To the moment, the DSP has offered (significant)

organisational concessions, and the left needs to see some of that goodwill also extend to the political arena from the largest group amongst our ranks.

Isn't the point to reach a more substantive political agreement than currently exists as per the skimpy and embarrassing SA platform by genuine consensus? I would like to think this was the DSP's way forward now, but there is evidence to the contrary to suppose it not to be. We want a unified working-class fightback that flows from Marxist politics and socialist activism, not from administrative guile.

Queensland Nurses' Union

Bryan Sketchley, for Workers' Liberty, interviewed Beth Mohle

The Queensland Nurses' Union (QNU) has been engaged in a protracted dispute with the Queensland Labour Government. At the centre of the dispute has been a pay claim and work load issues. After extended negotiations with the government, the QNU felt it had little option but to propose strike action to their members. What followed were a number of short strikes that were well supported by the QNU members, and a number of strikes by auxiliary employees in hospitals, covered by other unions. Several offers from the government were rejected by QNU members. The QNU felt that the dispute had reached an impasse, and arbitration was one of the few avenues left to it. During the course of the dispute, the nurses had overwhelming public support, and their well supported industrial action had spurred other state government employees to industrial action, pursuing their EBA claims. The government was clearly on the defensive. There was widespread community support for their actions, and other unionists frustrated by the government's continual blocking on EBA claims saw there was some sense in organising industrial action to press their claims. If the nurses' industrial action had continued, and a good deal had been secured for their members, there was a very real possibility of the State Government EBA floodgate being prised open. As it stands, the Beattie Government has renewed its stalling tactics in a range of EBA negotiations, and the nurses must rely on the goodwill of the arbitration commission to deliver a favorable response. It may be the case that the union will yet snatch a compromise from the jaws of victory. Other public sector unions are keenly awaiting the outcome of the arbitration. Our hope is that a core of QNU activists will take time to reflect on the dispute, and the value of industrial campaigns in winning what the government is intent on denying health workers - wage increases and improved conditions. Further, that if any future action is to succeed, such activists will need to organise independently of the current leadership and shed an unfounded faith in arbitration, looking instead to widen any actions they take, in order to include and encourage other unionists disaffected with government industrial policies.

Bryan: Can you tell us about the roots of the dispute?

Beth: The roots of our current campaign go back some years in reality - the result of years of neglect of nursing

workforce issues. Nursing has been systemically undervalued and this undervaluation must be addressed as a matter of urgency. There is currently an international shortage of nurses, so this undervaluation is not limited to Australia. This fact is acknowledged by the recently released Senate Community Reference Committee report on their Inquiry into Nursing, titled *The Patient Profession: Time for Action*. In summary, our current campaign - "Nurses. Worth looking after" - believes that a multi-layered approach is required to the current crisis. Short, medium and long-term strategies are required and must involve all in our community - state and federal governments. Employers, the community, nursing organisations and nurses themselves. The current national (and indeed international) shortage of nurses is in our view the most pressing issue requiring attention in our health system. According to the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Skills Shortage Survey, no other area of skill shortage in Australia comes close to approaching the magnitude, depth and breadth of the nursing shortage. Yet what is the Queensland Government doing to address this crisis? This is a complex issue and we have many suggested strategies aimed at retaining and attracting nurses. In summary however, we state that we believe that strategies must be focused on five key areas:

Remuneration - ensuring nurses are appropriately remunerated for their skills and the work they perform

Workload management - ensuring that the workloads of nurses are safe for both nurses and those in their care

Education - ensuring that educational programs for nurses are available, appropriate and affordable

Workplace environment - ensuring nurses are provided with a safe, secure and supportive workplace environment

Nursing workforce planning - ensuring that there is coordinated and well-resourced nursing workforce planning that pays particular attention to the unique nature of the nursing workforce (predominantly female, aging and required to work non-standard hours)

Bryan: The union rejected a number of offers from the Government before settling on going to arbitration. Did the union feel that the Government wasn't going to improve their offer?

Beth: It was obvious to us that the Government was not going to improve on their last offer to this and our members had advised us, through workplace-based report-back meetings, that this response was inadequate. Given this apparent impasse, arbitration is the only avenue open to us.

Bryan: Do you think it has been harder trying to deal with a Labor government, than it may have been dealing with a Conservative coalition?

Beth: Governments as employers can be difficult to deal with, no matter what their political persuasion. We have had difficult battles in the past with both Conservative and Labor governments and no doubt will continue to do so in the future. Our role is to represent the interests of our members no matter who is in power.

Bryan: There was obviously a high level of support from workers and the community generally. Can you tell me what the union did to capitalise on that support?

Beth: Our communication strategy incorporated communicating with the community on our campaign. Indeed this was one of the central features of the campaign

- specific materials were developed for this purpose. We also attempted to engage the community on our issues of concern by taking our message to them. For example, we gathered signatures on our petition at the Brisbane Rugby League State of Origin match at QEII stadium. Our local branch officials across the state also held information stalls in their local town malls and agricultural shows. We attempted to take the message to the public in as many ways as possible. We also ensured that we took phone calls from the public during the campaign, answering all queries and distributing background information and responding to all e-mail and letters. For us this campaign is essentially about the future of nursing and therefore the provision of health services to the public. It was therefore essential that the community be engaged and informed of the issues, even though some of these were complex and took some time to explain. Community engagement and support were essential for us - and we never took this for granted.

Bryan: Any advice for public sector unionists battling on the EBA front at the moment?

Beth: No, we wouldn't presume to give advice to our comrades in other unions - they have their strategies and we hope that they are successful. When one union succeeds we believe this has positive flow on effects for all. This is a critically important time for public sector unions and solidarity and support for each other's struggles is essential.

Defend the Victorian AMWU

By Riki Lane

Howard and Ruddock's Government is out to destroy militant unions. They are after the construction unions via the Cole royal commission and the construction industry taskforce. The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) Victorian branch are being attacked by the Skilled Six court charges. We have to put all our weight behind these unions.

National Secretary Doug Cameron used the recent AMWU national conference to further concentrate control at the

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not the millionaires'*

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top. We have to fight this and his attempts to hamstringing the Victorian branch.

Workers' First in Victoria and their allies in the Printing and other divisions represent democratic militant class-struggle unionism. Cameron's faction represents the continuation of the Stalinist-turned-social-democrat tradition of Laurie Carmichael that gave us the disaster of the ALP-ACTU Accord.

All socialists and unionists have a stake in this battle, and in defending the building unions from attacks by the Federal Government. We need to build union defence committees and raise motions of support in other unions and campaigns. Socialist Alliance has made a good start by building public meetings to defend the Victorian AMWU. Most importantly of all, we need to spread the lesson that class struggle unionism can win. The best way to build solidarity is to build effective rank-and-file organisations across the union movement that can transform it.

The Victorian left unions - AMWU, Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Textiles, Clothing, Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) are leading industrial struggles and taking up political issues amongst their memberships. They represent a vitally important tradition of class struggle unionism that puts the interests of their members first. They back each other up in fighting the boss such as by supporting each others' picket lines.

By winning gains in wages, hours and conditions, these unions have the strong support of the rank and file. They have been able to grow in membership - whilst as a matter of fact most unions' membership rates have been in decline - and have a real basis to take up issues like support for refugees.

However, the other side of this focus on the members is that they do not make enough time for political coordination. They have not developed a broad political strategy for the working class - either through taking up a serious political battle in the ALP or by building an alternative workers' party.

Socialist Alliance is a step towards the political leadership that the working class needs. But political action by the left unions would carry much more weight. Socialists can combine the activities of forging solidarity with unions under attack and discussion with unionists about how best to create that leadership.

Workers' Liberty journal re-launched: *Reason in revolt*, Vol. 2 No.2, "The tragedy of Afghanistan"

Contents include:

Pakistani socialists stand against war and fundamentalism, the politics of globalisation and imperialism today, Afghanistan and the shape of the 20th Century, the rise of political Islam, the "Third Camp" in France, Marx, Engels and war, the theory of accommodation, Reviews: Exploitation in China, Trotsky in World War One, The biography of an equation

\$12 per issue or send \$A65 for a subscription 6 big issues per year Send cheques to 'Workers' Liberty' P.O. Box 313 Leichhardt 2040 Australia.

A COMMUNITY MEETING
in response to the 'Blackshirts'
7 pm Thursday 12th September
Brunswick Town Hall (Cnr Sydney Rd and Dawson St)
Melbourne

WHY THIS MEETING?

_ A Brunswick-based group of men who wear black para-military uniforms, masks, and swastika-like badges are harassing single mothers, their children, partners, and members of the gay and lesbian community in and around the Melbourne area.

We want to inform residents of the threat posed by this vigilante group and discuss ways to ensure the protection of our diverse community.

ABOUT THEM

- _ Calling themselves the '*Blackshirts*' (previously known as the 'Southern Cross Good Fathers'), this ultra-conservative group is made up of men who believe that those who are not in a 'traditional' father-headed family are in some sense evil.
- _ Many of the group's members are men who have themselves suffered through marriage breakdown, and who have lost custody of their children.
- _ Some of the group's members have had intervention and restraining orders placed on them, but continue to make threats against people who are caring for children and not living in 'conventional' households.
- _ Many members believe the Family Court system is destroying the family unit. They want to make divorce illegal.
- _ They borrow many of their ideas/symbols from fascist ideology and are particularly outspoken in their anti-homosexual and anti-adultery views.
- _ They claim that their membership numbers are around 300, and are looking to set up a 'youth wing' as well as to expand into NSW, Qld, Tas. and SA.
- _ The Blackshirts are committed to 'direct action' and want to make up for what they see as the shortcomings of mainstream men's advocacy groups.

WHAT THEY'VE DONE

- _ They have...
- _ distributed abusive 'open letters' in victims' neighbourhoods
- _ gathered outside victims' houses and howled their abuse through megaphones
- _ made phantom phone calls
- _ stalked women
- _ hit, threatened and spat on family law practitioners.
- _ disrupted family court proceedings

THEIR LEADER

- _ The leader and main spokesman for the Blackshirts has used various names: usually he is known as John *Abbotto* or John *Abbott*.
- _ Abbott(o) owns the Dane Center, a recording studio and entertainment venue in Brunswick.
- _ Abbott(o) has participated in recent elections, representing the *No GST Party*, and the *Family Law Reform Party*.

THE REACTIONS SO FAR

- _ Judges, the State Premier, the State Attorney-General, a Family Court Chief Justice, and even conservative 'shock-jock' radio presenters have openly condemned this group and their tactics.

WHAT WE THINK THEY REPRESENT

- _ This group seems to combine all the most disturbing elements of misogyny, fascism and homophobia.
- _ The Blackshirts are headed by zealots who are eager to frighten, intimidate and threaten people who do not live according to their outdated moral code.
- _ The group appeals to men who are themselves grieving after suffering great loss...it is actually exploiting such men.

OUR RESPONSE...SO FAR

- _ Brunswick citizens and others have formed DiSC (Diversity, Safety, Community), a group committed to countering the Blackshirts.
- _ DiSC has begun work on a phone tree, and a rapid response network that would mobilize support for victims in the event of a Blackshirts 'visit'.
- _ DiSC has distributed open letters informing neighbourhoods of the Blackshirt threat.

MORE INFORMATION

Call Riki 0400 877819 Paula 9387 2217 George 038309605

Blackshirts: what they are and how to fight them

By Riki Lane

My household was threatened with a visit from the Blackshirts.

This happened after a chance meeting by Paula and Caz (who live out the back) with Blackshirts leader, John Abbott. He was being interviewed when they walked out the gate - they got involved, he took them for a lesbian couple. If they were "teaching homosexuality to children", they were "predators on children" and he was "the protector of children".

The accompanying article, produced by Diversity In Safe Communities, outlines some of their anti-woman and anti-lesbian activities and attitudes. They are a group of fascistic misogynists rather than a fascist movement properly speaking.

Their demonstrations outside women's homes are tightly regulated to try to keep within the law, but their members have a string of intervention orders against them. There is no record of violent actions that can be directly attributed to them, although there are allegations of other actions (I cannot detail these, as they will sue the pants off me).

Paula and Caz sought, and gained, a wide ranging intervention order against Abbott and the Blackshirts. But we know that the law and the police can not protect us. Instead, we have mobilised our neighbours, political networks and community networks. They have responded wonderfully. We will defend ourselves, with that assistance. In organising this campaign, we have taken on some issues that the left usually abandons to the right. People want to feel safe in their homes. These right-wing vigilantes who want to impose their repugnant morals threaten that security. They represent a far greater danger than the "criminals" played up by the "law and order" lobby.

We can concretely make connections between working people's need for security and: the role of the police as that of defending property, not aiding personal safety; the right-wing ideology of "family values" promoted by John Howard and Tony Abbott; the lack of a universal welfare net for child support; the way that fascists support capitalism.

I think this is exactly the level of campaign that activists in the Socialist Alliance need to work at seriously. We have to get right down to the grassroots - talking to working people in the streets and on the doorsteps, taking up the issues they feel to be pressing and making the connections to the bigger picture of capitalist exploitation.

Israeli Refusenik Rotem Mor Speaks at meeting hosted by Jews4Just Peace

7:00pm Tuesday 17 September

Contact: Vivienne Porzsolt: ph (02) 9357 2134

Or Rotem Dan Mor: ph 0417 063 255

Rm 16, Lev 24 Tower Building,
University of Technology Sydney. Broadway

Trade Unionists for Refugee Rights

Meryan Tozer

In Victoria, a Trade Unionists for Refugee Rights committee works to increase union and working-class support for the refugee campaign. Its stated aims are to mobilise the union movement in support of refugees, to provide information to unions and workers and to join others in the struggle for justice for refugees.

TURR is not a sub-collective of parent-RAC, but rather a trade unionists' committee that includes RAC activists, as well as a Labor for Refugees member. It was formed as such to maximise agency and involvements of trade union members in the group. The Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) social justice representative and an Australian Nurses Federation member are key contacts and coordinators of TURR.

At a recent VTHC meeting, TURR launched a refugee information kit for trade unions that includes articles for publication in union newsletters, a speaking kit for addressing union meetings with some model motions and a form on which unions can indicate how TURR can resource and inform their members (e.g. by providing a guest speaker at branch meetings).

The focus of TURR is largely on educating workers, as well as on prompting unions to pass motions in condemnation of current refugee treatment and to come out in support of the community campaign. In comparison, the Brisbane RAC trade union sub-collective in which I was previously involved focussed heavily on a call for work bans on the building and operation of a new detention centre at Pinkenba, while also performing an educational and awareness-raising role.

Call for work bans vital

I believe that the call for union work bans was vital to the effectiveness of our work with unions and, indeed, to the broader refugee campaign for a number of reasons. Firstly, it meant that we asked unions to pass motions that had an action component rather than simply asking them to make an in-principle statement. The motion was presented broadly enough to allow unions to commit to either imposing work bans or offering solidarity to those taking work ban action, but their commitment was an important starting point.

Secondly, it allowed us to use existing 'wages and conditions' union campaigns in detention centres as a springboard for action with a broader social perspective. That is, in a practical way, we tied workers' exploitation to the exploitation of refugees, to not only give leverage to the refugee campaign, but also to demonstrate the connected nature of racism and workers' exploitation.

Finally, and most importantly, the work bans campaign recognised that workers have the agency to stop the operation of detention centres at the most immediate level. Community campaigns, such as the one run by RAC, will change public opinion and may sway government policy, but workers in detention centres are most directly poised to put a real spanner in the works.

In light of this reasoning, I believe that TURR in Melbourne could encourage more targeted union action against the existing detention centre at Maribyrnong and others around the country, to tie in also with the potential for transport and airline unions to boycott forced deportation of asylum seekers. A couple of ideas thrown around at the Workers' Liberty AGM to support a broader work bans campaign included:

constructing a website that publicises cases of union/worker civil disobedience both in refugee cases and other social justice cases.

combining discussions about the appalling treatment of refugees in detention centres with information about the conditions for workers in DCs. (There have been union 'wages and conditions' campaigns against ACM and Chubb for workers at Woomera and Nauru). The issue of workers' conditions is particularly important because implementing Australia's refugee policies that are so psychologically destructive for refugees is also taking its toll on the stress levels and mental health of the workers.

Promoting the long, and often unknown, history of social movement unionism in Australia.

Martin Niemöller, a Protestant pastor, has become the most famous of all anti-Nazis. His words have been quoted a million times.

"First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade-unionist. Then they came for me and there was no-one left to speak out for me".

Good words. The story behind them, however, helps explain why so very few did speak out when the Nazis came for the Jews.

In the same anti-Nazi book where he published those words, in 1937, Niemöller also reprinted a sermon he had delivered in the early years of Nazi rule which was fully in line with centuries-long Christian anti-semitism.

In the Jews, he had declared, "we see a highly gifted people... but whatever it takes up becomes poisoned, and all that it ever reaps is contempt and hatred because ever and anon the world notices the deception and avenges itself in its own way".

The Jews, he continued, were guilty of "the blood of Jesus and the blood of all his messengers... and the blood of all the righteous men who were ever murdered because they testified to the holy will of God against tyrannical human will". He opposed human retribution against the Jews, on the grounds that the punishment could only be imposed justly by God, but did not question that Jews, collectively and by nature, were guilty and poisonous.

Almost all Christian church leaders in Germany took the same view of the poisonous nature of Jews. Most did not accept Niemöller's view that retribution should be left to God. They supported, in principle if not in every detail, the Nazi claim that political action must be taken to rid Germany of Jews. The Protestant church leaders were more vehemently anti-semitic than the Catholic, but the difference was only one of degree.

Church leaders spoke out against the Nazi regime loudly on other issues - notably, their own autonomy - but not on the persecution of the Jews.

Book review

An outdated dystopia

Imperialism in the 21st century, by Doug Lorimer.

Resistance Books, 2002, \$4.95.

Reviewed by Martin Thomas

According to Doug Lorimer, the Cold War of 1947-1989 was a conflict between "the world's chief imperialist power", the USA, and countervailing forces.

Those countervailing forces he describes negatively as "an enormous wave of political rebellion and social insurgency" or "anti-imperialist rebellions", but positively as "the mass resistance of the Soviet workers and peasants and local worker-peasant movements under Stalinist leadership", "the Soviet workers and peasants in uniform", or "sections of the working class that were attracted to the Soviet alternative to capitalism".

The tussle, on Lorimer's account, went mostly the way of the countervailing forces. "The US defeat in Vietnam [in 1975] was the culmination of the shift in the international relationship of class forces to the detriment of imperialism resulting from the wave of mass insurgency... In a few countries, such as China, Korea, Cuba and Vietnam, this mass insurgency led to the creation of workers' and peasants' governments". A new such "workers' and peasants' government", according to Lorimer on another page, was created in Afghanistan in the late 1970s.

Onwards and upwards!

Yet, according to Lorimer, something then went wrong. Since the 1980s we have been in an era of "a sustained [imperialist] offensive to take back the post-war concessions [to] organised labour... [and] to the bourgeois regimes in the underdeveloped capitalist countries". The world is a US empire, "the last empire".

What exactly went wrong, Lorimer leaves mysterious. But he does indicate that the turning point came at the very height of the "shift in the international relationship of class forces to the detriment of imperialism", in the 1970s. At that very same time, the big capitalist economies ran into economic trouble, impelling the ruling classes to become more aggressive, and the countervailing forces were weakened.

"The Soviet model of 'socialism' with its bureaucratic mismanagement, political repression and low-quality consumer goods no longer appealed to broad masses of workers as an alternative to imperialist capitalism". Thus imperialists world-wide gained the same favourable absence of countervailing force that had already been secured earlier in the USA, where they had "completely marginalised those sections of the working class that were attracted to the Soviet alternative to capitalism and... therefore had no need to create a large 'welfare state'..."

By the logic of Lorimer's argument, he should severely condemn those too-fastidious workers whose new distaste for the USSR, on his account, opened the door for the imperialist counter-offensive. If only the workers had been

less picky, and had remained as supportive of Brezhnev as some of them were of Stalin in the days of high Stalinism, then surely the "shift in class forces to the detriment of imperialism" could have continued.

However, Lorimer is not logical. He plainly accepts that the workers had reasonable grievances. The USSR did display "bureaucratic mismanagement, political repression and low-quality consumer goods" - or, to speak more exactly, totalitarian suppression of the working class and social and economic inequality in many ways worse than the West's. When larger numbers of workers started to aspire to the old Marxist idea of the "free association of producers" (however confusedly understood) rather than accepting the USSR as a model of the alternative to capitalism, it had a very positive effect on "class forces". The period from 1968 through to the early 1980s saw huge workers' struggles, often winning considerable advances.

The most extensive gains for the "political economy of the working class" within capitalist economies had already been made in countries like Britain and Scandinavia, where labour movements were strong but Stalinist parties were weak. In Italy and France, where large sections of workers did support Stalinism, very little had been won in the way of "welfare states", the Communist Parties being more concerned with efforts, largely unsuccessful, to gain for themselves pockets of power in the state machine.

From about 1968 many fewer workers worldwide saw the USSR as any sort of model. The huge Italian and French Communist Parties condemned the USSR's 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Revolutionary groups grew. Many revolutionaries and many workers still had their thinking shaped by Stalinoid ideas, but their aspirations reached beyond the model of the USSR. All to the good.

Two things turned the tide. Firstly, large outright defeats (Chile 1973, Australia 1975, Italy around 1979, USA 1981, Britain 1984-5), or ebbing amidst confusion and disappointment (France 1981-3), of those workers' struggles, fundamentally due to the fact that nowhere were the new revolutionary groups, doing their best to re-learn Marxist politics after decades of Stalinist stifling, able to get far enough to form any sort of revolutionary party.

Secondly, the Stalinist systems coming towards the end of their rope. The problem was not, as Lorimer presents it, one of workers fussily rejecting a progressive and workable, if not quite perfect, system. The system was decaying through its own internal follies. Forced-march industrial development by state command in semi-autarkic economies could produce results of sorts, in creation of bulk crude industrial infrastructure, in some countries for a certain period. Beyond that it revealed itself to be, in the interconnected and technologically-dynamic world economy of the late 20th century, as utopian (or dystopian) as the 19th century communist colonies in the United States.

The revolt of the Polish workers in 1980-1, and the inability of Poland's autocrats to stop Solidarnosc continuing as an underground trade-union organisation after 1981, together with the USSR's inability to napalm the peoples of Afghanistan into submission (1979-88), marked the beginning of the end.

Workers' Liberty No. 26 September 2002

Though workers would play a big role in bringing down the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989-91, and gain considerably in civil and class liberties by doing so, the downfall came at a time when the left was too weak to shape events (its disarray partly caused by the backwash from disappointed illusions in Stalinism and experiences like the Cambodian Stalinist regime's mass murder of its own people in 1975-9), and so the Western big powers gained politically. Many workers in the East who were active making revolutions on their cities' streets wanted some version of West European capitalism as a "realistic" alternative to their status quo. It was a mirror-image of the support by many Italian, French and other workers in the 1940s and 50s for the USSR as the "actually-existing" alternative to what they knew and hated locally.

Third camp socialism

The great lesson of the whole period is the need to build a revolutionary workers' movement based on a "Third Camp" stance - independent working-class politics - rather than encouraging workers to line up behind whatever option of the powers-that-be seems to be "alternative" to the one immediately facing us.

Yet that is not Lorimer's conclusion. In his scenarios for the world after the Cold War, the working class appears only as a component of "revolutionary mass political action" or an "organised, consciously anti-capitalist mass movement", without any indication of the positive aims of such action or movement. He replaces his "two camps" view of the Cold War world by a "two camps" view of the 21st century world, only the "two camps" are now not East and West, but South and North, or "semi-colonial" and "imperialist".

Lorimer's use of the term "semi-colonial" is strange. He applies it to all the poorer, ex-colonial states of the world except the Stalinist ones. He explains the term by a quotation from Lenin: these are states which are "formally independent, but in fact... enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence".

The full quotation from Lenin runs as follows (Moscow 1948 translation; apparently Lorimer uses a slightly different translation): "Typical of this epoch is not only the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and colonies, but also the diverse forms of dependent countries which, officially, are politically independent, but in fact are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence. We have already referred to one form of dependence - the semi-colony. An example of another is provided by Argentina".

Lenin is referring to a table of the world's states a few pages earlier, in which he shows that over 60% of the world's population in 1914 lived in colonies or colony-owning states, another 22% in "semi-colonial countries", and 17% in "other" countries.

Lenin enumerates the semi-colonies as three: Persia (Iran), China and Turkey. It was not just a matter of them being economically weak. China's economically important areas were carved up into "spheres of influence" of different big powers. Persia (Iran) was closely dominated by Britain and Russia. Turkey had its entire public tax revenues controlled by a big-power consortium, the "Ottoman Public Debt Administration", which took what the big powers wanted in debt payments and gave the Sultan only what they chose to leave over.

All three countries, wrote Lenin, were "almost completely" or "becoming" colonies. They were delayed in that process because no one big power had established enough hegemony in them, nor had agreement been reached on dividing their territories between the powers. In the event Persia (Iran) would come under British domination until the 1950s and China would suffer Japanese conquest. In Turkey, German influence would prove dominant in World War 1, bringing Turkey into that war on Germany's side. After Germany's defeat in the war, Britain and France would divide up between them the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire; they would also try to divide up much of Turkey itself (British forces were kept in Constantinople [Istanbul] for five years), but be defeated by Ataturk's Turkish nationalist forces.

So much for the semi-colonies. Of the "others", Lenin wrote: "Finance capital is such a great, it may be said, such a decisive force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting, and actually does subject to itself, even states enjoying the *fullest political independence*" (emphasis added). It is that variant for which Argentina is cited as an example. Lenin also gives Portugal as an example of "financial and diplomatic dependence, *accompanied by political independence*". He describes Portugal as an "independent sovereign state"; indicates that "the Argentine bourgeoisie" (i.e. not any foreign power) are "the circles that control the whole of that country's [Argentina's] economic and political life".

At the time that Lenin wrote his pamphlet on *Imperialism*, some of his comrades were arguing for the Bolsheviks to drop their programmatic support for the right to self-determination of nations, on the grounds that, with the new Molochs of imperialism bestriding the world, no such thing was possible. In response to them, Lenin wanted to distinguish clearly between economic independence (*impossible* to attain, he conceded, in a highly interconnected capitalist world), and political independence (*difficult* to attain, but *possible*, and deserving support).

Lorimer obliterates the distinction that Lenin so wanted to make clear. He describes *all* economically weak countries as *by definition* semi-colonies - all of them, both the Turkeys or Irans and the Argentinas or Portugals - since they operate in a world dominated by the biggest concentrations of capital. Oddly, you have to suppose from Lorimer's account that even those Arab and African countries which were firmly within the USSR's sphere of influence during the Cold War, or India for example, were in his picture "semi-colonies" of the USA.

In the course of the 20th century it would turn out that there was more scope for "economic independence" than Lenin and his comrades expected. Although Argentina in 1914 was politically independent, British capitalists owned a huge share of its basic industries. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, not only Argentina but also pretty much every ex-colonial or ex-semi-colonial country took its basic industries into domestic (usually state) ownership, and created new industries under state or domestic ownership. Metropolitan-based multinationals continued to operate in those countries, but on different terms.

The local ownership did not make the countries "economically independent" - their capitalists still had to

trade, negotiate credit, acquire technologies from abroad, etc., in a world dominated by huge metropolitan-based concentrations of capital - but it did about as much as political action by capitalist nation-states can do in that direction. Some countries of the South - Mexico, Brazil, India, Taiwan, Korea, others - became autonomous centres for the export of capital and the rise of their *own* multinationals.

In the 1990s there was a new flux of metropolitan capital into the South, buying up many important enterprises there previously owned by the state or by local private capitalists. Much-enlarged local state and private capital remains, however, dominant in those countries.

Given these facts, what is the political significance of Lorimer's obliteration of Lenin's distinction? It is to suggest the winning of "independence" (vaguely defined, with no distinction made between political and economic independence) as the main desideratum in most countries of the world. Since those countries already have political independence, and about as much economic autonomy as is compatible with integration into the world market, the call must be for them to replicate the Stalinist dystopia - to launch themselves on a course of forced-march industrial development by state command in economies largely walled off from the rest in the world.

The powerful middle-class forces in many countries of the South who adopted that Stalinist programme, or diluted versions of it, between the 1930s and the 1970s, no longer want it. The workers in those countries do not want it either. For the "insurgent masses" of this or that poor country to make an attempt to replicate the "Soviet model" may look romantic and commendably "revolutionary" from the distance and comfort of Sydney, but for the workers in the poor countries it is not attractive.

Lorimer's programme is not only dystopian but hopeless. All it can achieve politically is to compromise sections of the metropolitan left, morally and intellectually, by persuading them to support hold-out Stalinoid regimes and forces in the name of the struggle against "semi-colonialism".

Throughout Lorimer's pamphlet the working class appears only as a force reactive to the initiatives of others - oppressed by imperialist rulers, occasionally hitting back at them, supporting the "Soviet model" then becoming disillusioned with it, and so on. The essential Marxist idea, however, is that the working class can define and create, by its own independent initiative, new perspectives and a new social order. That idea should guide us in the struggle against imperialism in the 21st century.

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Book Review

Left Business Observer, periodical

produced and edited by Doug Henwood,
Village Station, PO Box 953, New York
NY 100140704.

Also on web: <www.leftbusinessobserver.com>
Reviewed by Ronald F. Price.

Anyone wanting reliable information and left comment on the world economy and more will find much of interest here. The journal aspires to be a monthly, and is nearly that. It is available on subscription in both print and electronic form and subscription is now possible on line by credit card. On the web, usually one article is posted per issue after a delay of a month or two. Back issues' contents are posted for the last twelve years.

While the focus is on the USA the range of world events covered is wide. A random selection includes an interview with Boris Kagarlitsky on market Stalinism (issue 35); South Korea: security and development (36); the Brazilian Mussolini and his austerity program (37); women in Eastern Europe (38); Iraq: once a friend (44); Debt I: why does the US have so much of it? (45); and Moscow privatization (50).

In each issue a page and more is devoted to 'Money'. In addition to following the movement of federal funds and growth of the money supply and debt, this page follows changes in unemployment, investment and other topics. This and other articles are illustrated by splendid graphs which do much to make clear just what is happening. Just two examples, from issue 96 (17/2/01), illustrate the periodical's social approach: 'Poverty rates by race, 1959-99' and 'Real annual income of poor, middle incomes, and rich households, 1967-1999'.

The same issue (96) cited a report by the *Weekly World News* of an impending 'second Great Depression'. Doug Henwood's comment warned of taking too seriously 'intimations of doom', while at the same time he reported a number of indicators of the end of the boom by 2001.

Doug Henwood's comments on the 'awful crimes' of September 11th. (LBO.98, 18/10/01) are another example of the sound left philosophy informing this periodical. Comment is interspersed with fact (killed in the twin towers included 250 from India, 200 from Pakistan, and over 300 from Latin America). He shows clearly the source of "terrorism" among many Islamic youth, but comments: 'Yet even though one can understand the dire situation that produced Al Qaeda, its impossible to have any sympathy for either their ideology or tactics - unlike earlier great enemies of the US, from the Viet Cong to the Sandinistas'. Henwood's comments are supplemented by pieces by Boris Kagarlitsky and Tariq Ali which, while not dealing directly with September 11th, fill in helpfully on the wider scene.

Underlying the factual reporting of economic affairs is a clear socialist perspective which lies behind the left of the title. This comes through clearly in the 16/7/02 issue's front page editorial on recent events in the USA. The opening sentences read: 'What an exhilarating cascade of scandals! It's hard to decide whether to be outraged or delighted. . . ' After some more technical comment comes the essential point, one which I fear is often forgotten: 'And any pleasure in scandal is diluted by knowledge that just focussing on some bad apples diverts our attention from the rest of the barrel - that is, the structural problems of American capitalism, a system that generates poverty, and toxic waste, along with the faster Pentiums it delivers'.

To conclude: this is a valuable tool for those of us who wish to ensure that our socialist ideas are based on an accurate knowledge of what is happening, particularly in the economy of the world's imperial super-power.

Film Review

Fond memories of Cuba

Directed by David Bradbury
Reviewed by Janet Burstall

David Bradbury's mission to Cuba was to bring back film of a hospital to which Jim Mitsos had made a large donation. Jim, a "millionaire socialist" explains his hopes and reasons for giving David Bradbury the money to make a film in Cuba, as they stroll a beautiful beach on the north coast of NSW.

Bradbury shot 120 hours of film in his three and a half months in Cuba, and he must have agonised over which 77 minutes of it to use. Whilst cinema operators and TV broadcasters might find this an ideal length, I kept wanting to see more. Reviewers in *Green Left Weekly* say that the film is fatally flawed because of what it leaves out but there is sufficient and irrefutable depth to the film to illustrate many of the problems facing the people of Cuba. And regardless of whose "fault" (US blockade, the Castro regime) you think these problems may be attributed to, they show that Cuba is in reality not the socialist paradise of the DSP's dreams.

The film provides a cross section of perspectives on Cuba. In Havana, we see how low the standard of living is for an elderly couple, who cart water up several stories to their crumbling apartment. Bradbury talks with a number of Havana residents about the deprivations of life and the lack of consumer goods. He travels through the countryside and sees the importance with which sugar cane is treated. He meets passionate musicians, one of whom carries his injuries from fighting on Castro's side in the revolution. The former Cuban consul to Australia, his daughter in high school and his wife who works in ballet, have mixed perspectives, and have both an ailing car and an apparently much better quality apartment (probably with running water) than the elderly Havana couple.

Then Bradbury moves into other pressing concerns about Cuba. The tourism industry, which is growing, brings US dollars and prostitution, including child prostitution. A respected Cuban film-maker has one successful screening of his latest work examining racism in Cuba. Officially there is no racism in Cuba, but nonetheless the authorities are too threatened by this critique to allow it to be seen any more, and the film is confiscated. Then Bradbury witnesses a small civil liberties protest, being challenged by government supporters. It's really a very mild protest, a few people, a few chants, much less militant than, say, S11 in Melbourne. Nonetheless it is harshly broken up by police and a sympathetic onlooker is highly anxious about the consequences of her companion talking about it on camera.

And Bradbury is never allowed inside the hospital to film for Jim Mitsos. That's a story that I'd like to know more about.

Bradbury does introduce a brief history of the Revolution, that is, of the 1959 overthrow of the dictator Batista, the early years of the Castro regime and the heroic status of Che Guevara. Bradbury supports this revolution, and it is quite clear from his telling that this was a guerilla military operation, not a popular uprising and seizure of power. There was popular support for the overthrow of Batista, for the Castro forces. He does not suggest that the Cuban workers and people's own mass organisations seized power to run the country themselves - the essential foundation of socialist revolution.

The *GLW* review says Bradbury doesn't show "one shred of evidence"... "that power mongers have usurped power and privileges from the Cuban people". Of course Bradbury can't show this evidence because the Cuban people have never had the power for it to be usurped. Castro and the Cuban CP since 1959 have had the power, and used a combination of Cuban nationalism and legitimate anti-USA

sentiment to maintain a level of popularity, backed up by the repressive measures necessary to maintain a one party state.

In fact, a subsequent letter to *GLW* by Barry Healy acknowledges that Cuba is a one-party state but claims it is "a democratic one nonetheless". A single party state that moreover does not allow factions, tendencies, or organisation around political platform or points of view is by definition not democratic. If the DSP sees a one-party state as "nonetheless democratic" then there are serious battles with the DSP ahead about the meaning of "democracy", particularly within the Socialist Alliance, especially if the DSP transfers its idea of democracy from Cuba to Australia.

Bradbury is questioning two fundamentals that we would expect from a workers' government. They are clarified in his letter of reply to the *GLW* review. He says, "many of the Cubans I met are disheartened with Fidel's lack of economic management over the years, and that they have no real choice of candidates or opportunity to seriously debate issues in open forums without reprisals or privileges denied." These two issues I would say are interdependent and can be given life only through workers themselves organising to take over democratic management of production and asserting full freedom to organise politically. Bradbury does not make this a conclusion of his film. He leaves it more open than that.

Bradbury has not made this film as an antagonist of Cuba, or Castro, having visited Cuba several times. His expression of fondness is genuine. Hopefully the *GLW* reviewers are not representative of a homogenous, dogmatic and closed reaction by DSP members considering the implications of Bradbury's valuable documentary.

NO WAR ON IRAQ!
Sydney
Demonstrate September 28
Rally 12 noon Town Hall Square
March to Hyde Park via US consulate

The US and British governments, supported by John Howard, are threatening a war on Iraq that will cost thousands of innocent lives.

On the second anniversary of the Palestinian intifada, show your opposition to a war on Iraq and the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands.

Organised by: No War on Iraq

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Palestine Human Rights Campaign Ph: 8080 8125

Melbourne

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DEMAND: No war on Iraq! Israel out of Palestine!
CALLED BY: Palestine Solidarity Network. Join us on the day following the anniversary of the Intifada to protest war on Palestinians and Bush's looming war on Iraq. Contact Marcus on 0402 555 591.

Stop the war drive (continued from back page)

What is now Iraq was for centuries three provinces of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from Istanbul - Basra, Baghdad and Mosul. The three provinces were not particularly closely connected with each other. Basra was oriented to trade in the Gulf, Baghdad more to overland trade between Iran and Syria, and Mosul to Turkey.

As late as 1867, 35% of the rural population were nomads. The rest practised agriculture with low productivity. In the Ottoman Empire all land was theoretically the property of the state. In daily practice most land was clan holdings. Britain, long interested in the Gulf because it was an important link in the chain of communications and trade between London and India, conquered Iraq during World War 1. After the war Britain and France secured a carve-up of the former Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire whereby France got Syria and Lebanon, and Britain Iraq, Jordan and Palestine.

Iraq was supposed to be held by Britain as a "League of Nations mandate", not a simple colony. And during the war Britain, seeking Arab support, had promised that it would assist Arab independence after the war. To serve appearances, and to try to calm Arab resentment, Britain created an Iraqi monarchy - from an Arab warlord family

originating in what would become Saudi Arabia. In fact British officials, and the British air force, ruled the country.

The British already knew there was oil in Iraq. Oil exports from Iran had started in 1919, under British control. From Iraq they would start in 1931. Most Iraqis saw none of the new oil wealth. It was a small enclave of the economy, isolated from the rest. In the countryside Britain - following the model of its rule in India - created a pliant landlord class out of selected tribal shaykhs, and let the peasants rot under the landlords' domination.

In 1932 the League of Nations mandate officially ended. Britain, however, secured a treaty which enabled it to continue effective control. Or, rather, Britain was determined to keep control, treaty or no treaty. In 1941, during World War 2, an Arab nationalist, Rashid Ali, managed to oust the veteran, pliant, pro-British Prime Minister, Nuri al-Said. Rashid Ali was pro-Nazi, and pogroms against Baghdad's then-large Jewish population accompanied his rise to power; but the essential thing for the British was that he threatened British control. Britain promptly invaded to restore Nuri al-Said and effective British control.

Popular resentment against the British grew. Eventually, in July 1958, a group of army officers overthrew Nuri al-Said and the monarchy. They never established any regular democratic institutions, but the coup was followed by a real political opening-up and effervescence. Trade unions, newspapers and political parties grew.

Iraqi Communist Party grows

The Iraqi Communist Party became by far the country's strongest, to the degree that in January 1959 it felt obliged to issue a public statement saying that no new members could be admitted to the party for the time being because its administrative capacities had been strained beyond the limit.

It was a Stalinist party with no historical background in independent working-class politics, having been formed as late as 1934. Nevertheless, it became the repository of the hopes and energies of many Iraqi workers and peasants who were encouraged by the widespread Arab revolts of the time against Western control (Algerian war; Egyptian nationalisation of Suez Canal, 1956) and wanted to go further to some sort of "socialism".

The options the party leadership saw were to plot for a new coup which would put themselves in power, in place of the incumbent Arab-nationalist and vaguely-socialistic army officers, in order to transform Iraq on the model of the USSR, or to accept those officers as the best that Iraq could get at the time and try to get reforms and political influence for the Communist Party by a combination of reliable support for them and judicious pressure.

That they chose the second option was not a "betrayal", or an abandonment of a possible socialist revolution, because the installation of Stalinism in Iraq would have converted the country into a prison for its workers. Nevertheless, it had disastrous effects both for the party's worker and peasant members and for its leaders.

In 1963, and again in 1968, there were coups organised by groupings within the army. Conflicts over intra-Arab politics - over whether, for example, Iraq should join the "United Arab Republic" which was announced by Egypt and Syria in February 1958 and continued, at least on paper, until 1962 - played a big part in the background to those coups, but in terms of Iraqi politics they were fundamentally shifts to the right, consolidating a more and more authoritarian military-based regime. The 1963 coup, in particular, was followed by large massacres of Communist Party members and supporters. The CP would be further decimated in the 1970s. By July 1978 the regime had a law which made reading the Communist Party newspaper punishable by death for all former members of the armed forces, i.e., in a country with universal conscription, all adult males.

Communists massacred

The shift to the political right, however, did not stop the regime being "socialistic" in the sense of desiring state control and such "economic independence" as was feasibly open to Iraq. It retained friendly relations with the USSR even while massacring the Iraqi Communist Party. By 1982, 134,000 of the 173,000 workers in "large industrial establishments", "large" meaning with more than nine workers, were in state employment. Private capitalists continued to operate, but depended for profits on state contracts and favours. This was not a capitalist order where the capitalists controlled the state by virtue of first having enriched themselves; it was the other way round, one where those who would get rich did so by first getting a post in the state machine, or the favours of someone in the state machine.

The decisive nationalisation, of the oilfields, was carried out in June 1972. Soon afterwards, with the big oil price rises of 1973-4, the Iraqi state was receiving revenues far outstripping anything the country's economy had known before. Although much was spent on prestige buildings and on equipping the army, ordinary Iraqis also benefited from a great expansion of education, health services, and public infrastructure. Agriculture decayed - Iraq, once a grain exporter, now has to import large amounts of wheat - but the government did not care. To put resources into improvements in agricultural productivity seemed pointless when the gains could only be a small fraction of the huge ones got from oil. Peasants fled the land, knowing that even a shanty-town hut and the chance of some casual work in the city would give them a better living than staying in the countryside, and 69% of the population was urban by 1980.

Above all, though, the oil revenues helped the dictatorship, now led by Saddam Hussein, to consolidate itself.

What Iraqi workers now needed was not for the country to become more "independent" - neither politically nor economically was more "independence" possible in the world as it was. What they needed, first of all, was democratic rights for trade-union and political activity, and links of solidarity with workers elsewhere in the Middle East which would open the possibility of the region's huge oil wealth being used for the common good rather than for the benefit of a few corrupt dictatorships.

What they got from Saddam Hussein, however, was an attempt to launch Iraq on a new "sub-imperialist" course. Iraq had longstanding border conflicts with Iran. Much of

the border area, on both sides, is populated by Kurds who have good cause to detest both Iranian and Iraqi states. Iran sponsored and aided rebellions in Kurdish Iraq in return for a promise by the Kurds to stay quiet in Iran. Iran under the Shah both was a bigger power than Iraq in its own right, with a much larger population, and enjoyed strong support from the USA. In 1975 Iraq signed a deal on the border issues.

Then, however, the Iranian revolution of 1979, when Islamists leading a huge mass revolt overthrew the Shah, changed the terms. Saddam saw new possibilities and new threats. New threats: the Kurds, more assertive in Iran where the Islamic clerics still presided over tumult rather than a consolidated dictatorship, might become more assertive in Iraq. Iraq's Shi'a Muslims, who are reckoned to be a majority of its population, especially in the south, might sympathise with the Iranian Islamists, also Shi'a, against the Sunni elite ruling Iraq. Islamist groups in Iraq were agitating, and Iran's new rulers made no secret of their dislike for Iraq's secular regime.

New possibilities: since Iran was in turmoil, it might be defeated easily. Iraq could then seize territory from Iran, and replace Iran as the dominant regional power in the Gulf.

USA, Iraq and war

In the end it seems that Saddam miscalculated both on the threats and the possibilities. There was no Islamist revolt in Iraq; but Iran proved very capable of fighting back after Iraq invaded in 1980. The war continued for eight years, killing maybe half a million people and taking a huge economic toll. Outside powers were happy to keep it bubbling away, since as long as Iran and Iraq were locked in war neither could establish itself as the regional hegemon and threaten others' interests. The USA, in particular, aided Iraq, especially in the last phase of the war, when it seemed that without such aid Iran could win a clear victory.

The war ended in stalemate, in 1988. A little while afterwards the 1975 agreement was reinstated. On both sides all the deaths, injuries and damages were for nothing. Both governments, however, had used the war to establish permanent, terrorist, war-emergency regimes. The Iraqi regime massacred thousands of Kurds to consolidate Baghdad's always-shaky rule. The horrors of the war evidently impressed Saddam much less than the augmentation of his personal power that came with it. In August 1990 he tried a new gambit of military expansion, annexing the neighbouring small but oil-rich state of Kuwait.

Whether Saddam, over-confident from the USA's then-recent lavish support for him, really thought the USA would let him get away with that conquest, I do not know. In any case, the USA did not. In a war in 1991 it drove Iraq back out of Kuwait, at minimal cost of American lives but large cost of Iraqi civilian and conscript lives.

Significantly, the USA then publicly abandoned to their fate the Shi'a and Kurdish rebellions which erupted in Iraq after

Saddam's defeat. It would rather deal with Saddam than take the risk of trying to maintain a puppet regime in Baghdad, or seeing the whole Iraqi state fragment. Eventually, after some diplomatic wrangling, a semi-autonomous "safe haven" for the Kurds was established as part of the Kurdish area, with some limited international protection.

The United Nations, prompted by the USA, introduced economic sanctions against Iraq, notionally to ensure that it scraps all "weapons of mass destruction" and does not build new ones. The USA must have hoped that the sanctions would produce results quicker. In fact they seem to have provided a nationalist rallying cry for Saddam to maintain his rule while the Iraqi people have been pauperised.

Saddam's political trump card for some time had been the claim to be the most militant Arab leader against "Zionism". Mostly he established the claim by speeches and bluster, enjoying the advantage that his state - unlike Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, all of which he could denounce as weak - has no common border with Israel. In 1991, however, he fired a few rockets at Israel. The probability must be that in any "endgame" war Saddam, having nothing to lose, would throw whatever he could at Israel, hoping to take the maximum "Zionist" casualties and spread the war to the whole Middle East.

War, in the famous adage of Clausewitz much repeated by Marxists, is the continuation of policy by other means. We judge wars not by "who fired first" or "who attacked", but by the character of the established state *policy* which the war "continues" on either side. However criminal the USA's plans, on the Iraqi side the record makes it impossible to see the "policy" which Iraq's course towards war "continues" as essentially one of defence of its political independence and rights.

Since the 1970s, at least, Iraq's state policy has been essentially about trying to establish itself as a regional big power - a "sub-imperialist" centre. To do so it has repeatedly repressed smaller peoples - the Kurds, the population of Kuwait - and made war against its neighbours. Its policy towards Israel represents the worst Arab chauvinism, mitigated only by distance. The state's rule of fear against its own people goes hand in hand with its reactionary external policy.

When we are campaigning against the threat of US war on Iraq, therefore, we should not do so in any way that implies credence to or support for Saddam Hussein's "anti-imperialist" claims. Cheap agitation such as that which declares Bush and Sharon to be "the real axis of evil" and the "real terrorists" should be rejected. Whatever about Bush's hypocrisy, Saddam's regime is "really" as evil and as terrorist as any on earth. We oppose the US war plans, not in the name of support for the Iraqi regime, but in the name of international democracy and working-class solidarity - the "Third Camp".

Workers' Liberty

Mobilise to stop the war drive

Martin Thomas

The US administration wants to go to war against Iraq. Not only socialists and radicals in the USA and worldwide, but also large sections of the US ruling class and of the USA's usual bourgeois allies worldwide, think this is folly.

Since France's war in Algeria (1954-62), the USA's in Vietnam (1965-75), and Russia's in Afghanistan (1979-88), all of which ended badly for the big power involved, the big powers have generally avoided wars aimed at imposing a new, favourable regime in weaker countries or at propping up a puppet regime in such countries which would otherwise be overthrown by the local people. In the 1970s the big Western powers sat through a vast wave of nationalisations of their property in ex-colonial countries without any attempt to halt it by invasions or conquests.

They concluded that a much cheaper, more effective and less risky means of ensuring generally favourable conditions for the worldwide operations of their capitalists was what Karl Marx called "the dull compulsion of economic relations". However much an ex-colonial state nationalised, it would still have to negotiate trade deals, credit, and access to technology. The huge strength of the great capitalist centres in such negotiations would secure, not perfect guarantees, but good enough ones, and with far less cost and risk than trying to impose governors-general. The big powers calculated right, by their own criteria. Between 1975 and 2001, ex-colonial states rushed to join the IMF - it had 183 members in 2001, as against 130 in 1975 - and many of them have carried out IMF "structural adjustment plans", tailor-made to integrate them into the "imperialism of free trade". Several of the nationalisations of the 1970s have been reversed into privatisations, and all without any costly military action.

The big powers still waged wars. But those were police actions to maintain the general fabric of world-market order, not wars of conquest by one nation of another. At the end of the Gulf War of 1991, the USA deliberately refused to use its military advantage to replace Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government, as it easily could have done. In Bosnia and Kosova the USA has insisted that the local international administrators be a series of people from mostly small West European powers, not Americans. In Afghanistan, it declared, once having defeated the Taliban regime, that it would take no part in propping up or protecting a new government: Britain, and then Turkey, would have to do that.

Paradoxically, however, it seems to be the success of those "police action" wars that has pushed sections of the US establishment towards attempting what may be quite another sort of war. Between 1991 and 2001 the USA fought three large wars - Kuwait, Kosova, Afghanistan - and each time won decisively with virtually no casualties on its own side. Never before in history has any power had such a run of military success.

The success has induced an arrogance verging on megalomania. US strategists evidently believe that they are "on a roll", and should seize the chance to tidy up another problem. With enough "smart bombs", they can crush Saddam's regime quickly, set up an alternative, and then withdraw. At small cost they will have secured the end of the malodorous and ineffective UN sanctions against Iraq, established a reliable government over one of the world's major oil powers, and stabilised a crucial region.

Even if we thought that the gung-ho US strategists were calculating correctly, socialists could not support such plans. The overthrow of Saddam is for the people of Iraq to do, not for the US to impose on Iraq at inescapably large cost of Iraqi civilian and conscript life.

The US ruling-class dissidents, however, argue with much plausibility that their gung-ho colleagues have calculated wrongly. Iraq is a well-armed country with a population which, however much it hates Saddam, also has historically deep-rooted reasons to hate Western intervention and the USA. A war in Iraq will kill many US soldiers as well as Iraqi civilians; it may well ignite a general conflagration in the Middle East; even in the case of initial success, the US could find itself drawn into a quagmire as it tries to prop up a replacement Iraqi regime with no domestic political base, made up of corrupt careerists fresh from many years of living on CIA expense accounts in Western hotels.

Such a political quagmire could open up a whole new chapter in the history of imperialism. That is a real possibility for the future. To orient ourselves on the US/Iraq issue, however, we must start by understanding the chapter which we are now still in.

Continued Page 17