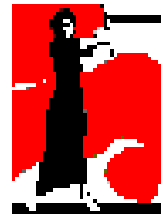


Workers' Liberty



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

ISSN 1446-0165

No. 23 April/May 2002

www.workersliberty.org/australia

\$2.00

Howard's plans to break the unions

Hands off the CFMEU!

Stop the Workplace Relations Act!

Inside:

WL exclusive! Centre page – for underage activists

⊖ Interview with arrested 12-year old freedom bus protestor ✓

Australia:

- Gov't plans class war. What about the unions?
- Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference – a report
- Imperialism and superpower wars – WL & ISO debate
- Why aren't the unions socialist?

International:

- **N** From our correspondent in South America **O**
- Italy's general strike
- Palestine/Israel – Israel must withdraw to 1967 borders

Socialist Alliance

Trade union seminars Saturday 11 May

Sydney

Rebuilding our unions – 1p.m.-4.30p.m.

Parramatta Town Hall, Church Street, Parramatta.

Howard's IR agenda and how to fight it. Workers, unions and Labor: whose party is it?

Speakers include John Buchanan (Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training), Peter McClelland President CFMEU (Construction Division) NSW.

Tel. 0418 450 812

Melbourne

Militant unionism and community solidarity.
9a.m.-6p.m.

Victorian Trades Hall Council Chambers
Victoria Street, Carlton

Conference speakers include: Martin Kingham CFMEU, Craig Johnston AMWU, Chris Spindler 'Skilled Six', Jill Polson AAWL

Tel. (03) 9639 8622 or 0407 096 996

Join Socialist Alliance:

email: ne@socialist-alliance.org;

Go to www.socialist-alliance.org

Convenors: Riki Lane 0400 877 819; Ian Rintoul 02-9261 4862; Pat Brewer.

Workers' Liberty Where we stand

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

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

The trade unions are the product of long struggles by the working class for the right to build their own organisations to protect them from the arrogant power of the bosses. They remain the major organisations of the working class, the major vehicles of class struggle.

There is no short-term prospect of them being replaced by new organisations. Since we believe socialism can be achieved only by the working class liberating itself, we must focus on the trade union movement, rather than on "radical" movements without a working class or socialist perspective.

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

Subscribe! Subscribe! Subscribe!

Make sure you have regular coverage of local and world events, analysis and comment from a Marxist point of view.

Subscribe to *Workers' Liberty* Australian monthly @ just \$A20 per year/10 issues.

Subscribe to the newly re-launched *Workers' Liberty* UK journal \$A65 per year/6 issues and get the Australian magazine for free!

Send cheques to "Workers' Liberty", P.O. Box 313, Leichhardt 2040, Sydney, NSW, Australia
Published by Workers' Liberty, P.O. Box 313, Leichhardt 2040, Sydney, Australia

Government plans class struggle. What about the unions?

EDITORIAL

“The big workplace relations breakthroughs need strong management as much as strong government” Tony Abbott told the March Conference of the anti-union H.R. Nicholls Society. At the same conference, Peter Reith lavishly praised Chris Corrigan whilst accepting a medal in honour of his union-busting efforts as a Minister in the Howard Government.

Abbott said that the Government would “focus as much on enforcing the law as on changing it”.

There are five bills before parliament to change the already draconian Workplace Relations Act. They split up the bill dubbed the “Third Wave”, which was defeated in the Senate before the last election.

These 5 bills would exempt small business from unfair dismissal laws, abolish union levies for negotiating work conditions that apply to non-union members, enforce secret ballots for strikes, ban pattern-bargaining, and give the IRC more power to order strikers back to work.

Pattern bargaining is particularly important, as it is the tactical response that unions such as the AMWU and CFMEU have found to maintain cross-industry solidarity since enterprise bargaining agreements replaced many awards. Unions lodge common claims for enterprise agreements with many employees simultaneously, and have won pay increases and shorter hours for workers from both weak and strong industrial positions.

John Howard justifies these plans to further weaken unions with the argument that it will create more jobs. If it is cheaper to employ workers, then more workers will be employed, the Government claims. This is a dubious argument. As unemployment statistics fall, inflation tends to rise. When unemployment falls, the bargaining power of unions tends to rise. The Reserve Bank will raise interest rates long before unemployment can fall below 5%, in order to slow the “overheating” economy. The Government only cares to appear to reduce unemployment in order to claim political credibility, and to save the welfare budget – but not so far as to make workers feel secure and confident enough to become industrially militant.

On the parliamentary front, Howard is challenging Labor and the Democrats to pass the Government’s bills to change “outdated industrial relations laws”. The Liberals are baiting Labor for its union connections, presenting them as an embarrassment. Abbott has flagged that he will be attacking the Victorian Labor Government if it doesn’t pursue criminal charges against AMWU leader Craig Johnson to the fullest extent possible. According to the *Australian Financial Review*, “Government strategists believe that because of his background as a former trade union boss, the Opposition Leader, Simon Crean, is vulnerable to pressure over claims he is dictated to by the unions opposed to workplace reforms.” Crean has already indicated that Labor will accept some changes to unfair dismissal laws.

The Government’s other weapon against unions is the courts, and most specifically the extravagantly paid and fully funded Cole Royal Commission, dubbed by the CFMEU “The Royal Commission into Stuffing the Building Workers.” The CFMEU is highlighting how much smaller the budget is for the inquiry into the HIH collapse, and has

presented several cartons of documents to the Cole Commission which reveal “rorts, rackets and ripoffs” by building employers. The CFMEU’s 24-foot high corporate rat is making the point that the Government and Cole Commission are both on the bosses’ side. These publicity efforts of the CFMEU are not going to be enough to save the union from the expected attempt to deregister the CFMEU as the sequel to the Commission.



The other targets of the Government in its third term are to further develop trade with Japan and China, to significantly increase spending on the military and the prevention of refugees from reaching Australia, changes to superannuation and one environmental matter – combating dry land salinity (which threatens to ruin many farmers).

Since 11 September, 2001, the Government has steadily increased the powers and budgets of the military and police, and reduced civil liberties, justifying this with an anti-terrorist, anti-refugee fear campaign.

This helps set a climate, but attacking unions is the main point. Whilst aiming to provoke a decisive showdown with unions, Abbott also claims that the Government is “fully post-Marxist in that we understand that competition between enterprises is much more significant than the class conflict within them... the rival teams are the workers and bosses at one business versus the workers and bosses at another.”

The Government, as the political wing of the bosses, is taking class conflict from the industrial to the political level and back again. If the union movement doesn’t recognise this, and prepare itself to answer with the full weight of union solidarity, then the Government will be the winner, whether the war takes the form of a series of smallish battles or one enormous conflagration.

We stand with the CFMEU against threats of deregistration. We demand that the ACTU stands by any union threatened with deregistration, and that no affiliated union should take on members of a union facing deregistration, or sign agreements in its traditional areas of coverage. We call on State Labor governments to continue to recognise any deregistered union in State tribunals, and to refuse to take any action against the assets of a deregistered union. We also call on the ACTU to prepare an industrial campaign against the new round of penalties in the WRA, and not to count on Labor and the Democrats stopping them in the Senate.

Stodgy in the middle, tasty at the edges

Martin Thomas

On Sunday morning, 31 March, a lot of the participants at the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference — organised by the Democratic Socialist Party, over the Easter weekend — joined a protest for refugee rights.

We marched to Villawood detention centre, in western Sydney, to show solidarity with the refugees shut up there and with the activists protesting the same weekend at Woomera detention centre.

It was a moving miniature example of what the theme of the conference — international solidarity — means at the most basic level. As we chanted and waved banners outside the outer fences of the detention centre, in the distance, behind razor-wire-topped inner fences, we could see refugees gathering, waving to us, hoisting a banner with the word "Freedom" on it; and, finally, we heard them respond to our chants with their own, "Freedom".

The conference itself was also valuable at the most basic level of international solidarity. Activists from different countries could meet and talk. It was an excellent forum to launch the international appeal, initiated by "No Sweat" in Britain, for the world labour movement to raise \$100,000 for Indonesia's independent trade unions. This appeal aims to match the US\$50,000 which Indonesian union leader Dita Sari turned down from the sports-shoe multinational Reebok when they offered it to her as a "human rights award" to improve their public image.

Some of the workshops — especially, or so it seemed to me, the less-attended ones — were very useful indeed for information about working-class movements in countries such as South Korea and South Africa. The DSP allowed for speakers from a variety of viewpoints other than their own to present workshops, and for a variety of groups to run literature stalls. Our Workers' Liberty stall did good business, both in sales and as a centre for conversations and discussions.

But in some ways the conference felt rather like an unevenly cooked cake which had congealed into sludge at the centre while the edges were crisp and tasty. The 800-strong conference, as a collective, never went very far, in debate and rigorous confrontation of ideas, beyond the general sentiments written on the platform banner: "peace, justice and solidarity for the Third World".

So far as I could see, at most one or two sessions in the whole conference were set up as debates. On the whole, different viewpoints were separated off into their own little workshops, a dozen or so workshops being held at any one time.

About 60% of the scheduled time was for plenaries. Each plenary would have anything up to half-a-dozen platform speakers, some extremely long-winded, usually leaving time for a hurried few comments from the floor.

Usually the platform speakers did not debate with, or comment on, each other; they just delivered setpiece speeches, one after another.

A typical plenary, for example, discussed "neo-liberalism and resistance after Porto Alegre". "Porto

Alegre" means the second World Social Forum, held in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February this year, as a counterpoint to the big-business multinationals' "World Economic Forum". One of the DSP's objectives with the Easter conference was to rally forces to hold a regional event on similar lines, an "Asia-Pacific Social Forum".

Pierre Rousset from the LCR in France opened the plenary, speaking at length on how deep the roots of the "World Social Forum process" are in the "social movements". Is "the movement" anti-capitalist? Yes and no. Is it addressing the issues of how to overthrow capitalist power? No, it focuses more on ideas of "counter-power" — but "the process" cannot be rushed.

Some other speakers, like Ahmed Shawki from the International Socialist Organisation USA, were on similar lines. The left must not attempt to hegemonise the movement; the movement must not be developed solely on anti-capitalist lines; etc.

Others struck a different note. Kautsar, from Aceh, said he had been disappointed to find the World Social Forum so dominated by NGOs, and the Indonesian delegates there from the "democratic bourgeoisie" rather than the left. Satya Sivaraman, an Indian socialist who had attended the WSF as a journalist, wanted to see the WSF democratised, with less "mysticism" about being "decentralised" which meant that decisions were made by a sort of "hidden hand". In order to make it more than just another "event" — "tourism for the activists" — it should include serious discussion about specific campaigns, like an international minimum wage.

None of these issues were debated out, though. Despite the advantages of us being seated in a conference hall, all set up for debate, the interchange of ideas did not get much beyond the level we had at the Villawood protest, where the DSP led us in a chant of "The people, united, will never be defeated", and then Farooq Tariq, from the Labour Party of Pakistan — without comment or polemic — used his speech to get us to echo the slogan, "The *workers*, united, will never be defeated".

Another example: a session on the left in Asia. Sonny Melencio, from the Socialist Party of Labour (an ex-CP group) in the Philippines, made a speech from which, really, I learned nothing about the Filipino left except that some of its leaders have a propensity for making long speeches about Lenin, imperialism, war, revolution, vanguard parties, imperialism, Lenin, vanguard parties, revolution, and war. Dita Sari, from Indonesia, told us matter-of-factly about how the Islamist groups in Indonesia have been able to rally 30,000 young people on the streets against the USA since 11 September, and her party is grappling with the problem of which Islamic groups they can make alliances with — the better to win over some of their young people — and which they have to fight head-on. A visible difference of approach — but no debate.

That's the DSP's choice — and an unfortunate one, in my view. But the rest of us still owe thanks to the DSP for the effort they put into an organising an event which allowed so many connections to be made, and so many ideas exchanged, at a more informal level. Conference website: www.global-revolt.org.

Workers' Liberty and the International Socialists debate superpower war and imperialism.

Leon Parissi

Should minor powers out for regional dominance — like Argentina in the South Atlantic, Iraq or Iran in the Gulf, or the Islamic fundamentalists round Al Qaeda in the Middle East — be considered "anti-imperialist", and therefore deserving of support from socialists, when they clash with the USA or other big powers?

That was the issue of debate when Martin Thomas from Workers' Liberty debated with Jarvis Ryan from the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) in Sydney on 2 April.

Martin Thomas, speaking first, recalled that much of today's left was shaped politically by campaigns about US aggression against the Vietnamese and Cuban peoples in the 1960s and 70s. The revolutionaries, then, were defined as those who were boldest and militant in solidarity with the Vietnamese and Cubans against US militarism.

Whatever we might say to ourselves now about our criticisms of the Vietnamese Stalinists and Cuban nationalists-evolving-into-Stalinists having been too mild, or too much limited to "small print", the struggles then were genuinely about national liberation against big-power domination.

Since 1975 or 1989, however, the cycle of struggles by colonial peoples for political independence has run its course. The world is shaped by an "imperialism of free trade", or an "empire of capital", rather than national empires.

Socialists are for small nations against domination by big nations. We are not for small capital in competition with big capital.

In the South Atlantic war of 1982, over the Falkland Islands; in the Gulf war of 1991, over Iraq; in the Balkan war of 1999, over Kosova; and in the Afghan war of 2001, over Al-Qaeda, the anti-US forces were not fighting for national liberation, but for their own regional "mini-imperialism".

Our socialist commitment to the right of nations to self-determination and to consistent democracy thus obliges us to take a "Third Camp" stance, for international working-class solidarity against both US militarism and regional aggressors.

Jarvis Ryan said that the "war on terrorism" is a drive by the USA to reassert its dominance. In recent years, we have seen a return to older patterns of imperialism similar to those analysed by Lenin nearly a century ago. The USA strives to police the world, but in a crisis-ridden global economy cannot do so smoothly. It is locked into unstable rivalry for dominance with Russia, China, the European Union, and Japan.

Anti-imperialism can emerge in many different forms. We must condemn the 11 September attacks on the USA, but we must not equate such actions with the overwhelming violence of US imperialism. Bin Laden expresses the anger of millions oppressed by US imperialism.

To condemn Islam, or to use slogans like "No to war, no to terrorism" in our response to 11

September would be a mistake. Evidence: where the major section of the left took that approach, in France, anti-war demonstrations were smaller than in Britain, where they took an approach of denouncing the US war without denouncing the Taliban.

In the 1999 Balkans war, it would have been a mistake to call for independence for Kosova; independence for any nationality in ex-Yugoslavia is problematic because of the criss-crossing of populations; national self-determination quickly turns into ethnic cleansing; and the Kosova Liberation Army was a surrogate for US imperialism. The disruptive rebellion by Albanian forces in Macedonia, linked to the KLA, shows the malign results of NATO's victory.

In the debate, veteran Trotskyist Bob Gould criticised both speakers. Bin Laden is an ultra-reactionary Saudi millionaire, not a representative of any mass revolt against imperialism. The Kosovars do have a right to self-determination; in fact, Bob was unabashed about wanting a "tactical alliance" with US imperialism in Kosova, or in East Timor.

However, Bob considered US imperialism to be the main enemy, and reckoned socialists should support the opponents of the USA in any "major" war. And he thought socialists should have supported Argentina in the 1982 war over the Falkland Islands: the inhabitants of the Falklands were not numerous enough to qualify as a nation, and their presence as an anomalous enclave population off Argentina's coast was a standing insult to Argentina's national rights.

Ian Rintoul from the ISO said that Lenin's argument about the right of nations to self-determination was essentially an argument about anti-imperialism — about how socialists could best help break up the power of their own ruling classes. For example, socialists have no concern for the Australian nation; but should there be sentiment in Western Australia to secede, then we would support it, the better to disrupt the Australian state.

But, Ian said, the argument was not one about taking sides. The stance of supporting *neither* side, which both Workers' Liberty and the ISO took over the South Atlantic war in 1982, was correct, and could be a model for similar conflicts in future.

Jarvis Ryan, summing up, said that in the conflict between the USA and the Taliban/Al-Qaeda, it was not the job of socialists to denounce terrorism. The ruling class was already doing that quite adequately. Our whole emphasis should be on denouncing US imperialism.

In his conclusion, Martin Thomas said that socialists who, in the days of the Cold War, had backed off from denouncing the USSR because the ruling class already did it had been wrong. We had to denounce the USSR in our own way, from our own viewpoint. Likewise, we should denounce terrorist-fundamentalism, or Iraqi sub-imperialism, from our own standpoint.

Lenin's prime concern on the national question was not how to break up existing multinational states, but

how to unite the working class across lines of nationality.

However, if Ian concluded that our basic stance in these conflicts between US superpower and predatory regional powers should be not to line up with one side or another, but rather to stand for working-class solidarity against both sides, then we had essential agreement — and the debate had marked real progress.

The downside of the meeting was a disappointing no-show from Socialist Alternative. Members of their Sydney branch were in the same building for their own meeting, for that evening — decided to cancel their meeting due to poor attendance — but turned down an invitation to join the debate. Their withdrawal from the Socialist Alliance reflects a reluctance to engage in dialogue with the rest of the left as much as a different calculation about tactics.

Solidarity with Indonesian workers International appeal to match Reebok's US\$50,000

Dita Sari, on behalf of herself and her union, recently refused to take a "human rights award" of \$50,000 from the sportswear transnational, Reebok. Reebok gives this award, annually, to a number of activists, because it is cheaper than paying the "Third World" workers who slave in its sweatshop factories a living wage. It makes Reebok look good.

The British anti-sweatshop campaign, *No Sweat*, has launched an international appeal for funds to help the Indonesian workers' movement. They are raising money for the campaigning union organisation, whose most prominent leader is Dita Sari, the National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPBI).

Dita explains that she turned the award down — despite that fact that her organisation could put the money to good use, because, "it would have been hypocritical to accept the money."

"In 1995, I was arrested and tortured by the police, after leading a strike of 5,000 workers of Indoshoes Inti Industry. The workers were demanding a wage increase (they were paid only A\$2.00 for an eight-hour day). They demanded maternity leave too. This company operated in West Java, and produced shoes for Reebok and Adidas. I have seen for myself how the company treats the workers, and used the police to repress the strikers."

No Sweat has agreed to raise £5,000 for these workers of the FNPBI, and is asking similar campaigns internationally to raise the remainder of the \$50,000 Dita would have received from Reebok. The Indonesian union won't take Reebok's dirty money — but they will accept your help and solidarity from your union.

Indonesia is, by population, the fifth biggest country in the world and its working class is now made up of over 80 million workers. It is extremely important that the international trade union movement helps the emerging Indonesian labour movement.

Why donate to Indonesian Workers' Solidarity?

Dita: *Why I refused Reebok's money*

"Globalisation is producing neither universal welfare nor global peace. On the contrary, globalisation has divided the world into two antagonistic parts.

"There are wealthy creditors and bankrupt debtors. There are super-rich countries and underdeveloped countries, super-wealthy speculators and impoverished malnourished children. Globalisation intensifies the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

"The low pay and exploitation of the Reebok workers of Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam are the main reasons why we will not accept this award.

"In Indonesia, there are five Reebok companies. 80% of the workers are women. Since the workers can only get around \$1.50 a day, they then

have to live in slum areas, in unhealthy conditions. This is particularly bad for the working-class children. At the same time, Reebok collects millions of dollars in profits, every year, directly contributed by these workers.

"We believe that accepting the award is not a proper thing to do. This is part of the consequence of our work to help workers improve their lives. We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of the Third World countries. And we surely hope that our stand can make a contribution to help changing the labour conditions in Reebok-producing companies."

About Dita Sari

Dita Sari is 29 and began her political activism ten years ago. The Indonesian labour movement faced constant repression under the Suharto dictatorship. Dita participated in setting up free trade unions, in leading illegal strikes and rallies to try to improve workers' conditions and agitating for open democracy in Indonesia. Dita Sari was frequently arrested, and she was tortured and imprisoned.

**by matching Reebok's
US\$50,000 we want to show
that solidarity is a power to
equal that of any transnational
corporation**

In 1996 she was jailed after leading a demonstration of 20,000 workers.

At her trial in 1997 Dita Sari handed flowers to the judge, prosecutor and hundreds of supporters packed into the public gallery. She then began reading a statement, and as she read people sang the popular song of struggle, "Hymn of Blood."

When the sentences were handed down, the crowd shouted: "The court is rigged!"

While Dita was in prison she was elected chairperson of the trade union, the National Front for Indonesian Workers' Struggle (FNPBI). She was released from prison in 1999 after the collapse of President Suharto, and after an international labour movement campaign, and publicity from Amnesty International.

In 2000 the FNPBI was recognised by the Indonesian government. Since her release she has continued to organise and agitate for improved conditions for workers in Indonesia: "We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of Third World countries."

About No Sweat

No Sweat is an activist, campaigning organisation in Britain, fighting sweatshop bosses, in solidarity with workers worldwide.

Sweatshop labour is modern, global capitalism stripped bare. From the small, backstreet sweatshop to some of the biggest corporations in the world — child labour, forced overtime, poverty wages, unsafe conditions, harassment of women workers and intimidation of trade unionists are commonplace.

No Sweat stands for workers' solidarity. It supports workers who demand:

- * A living wage
- * Safe working conditions
- * Independent trade unions.

All workers, in every country, deserve and need these

rights. In order to enforce these rights, they need to be free to organise — the stronger the union, the safer the workplace!

No Sweat in Britain works to:

- * Make solidarity with sweatshop workers and their organisations
- * Help unionise sweatshops in Britain
- * Publicise, expose and help stamp out sweatshop employment.

No Sweat tries to link anti-capitalist protest movements and the international workers' movement. They work to build common, united, campaigning action against exploitation and the sweatshop bosses.

How to help the Indonesian workers' appeal

An Australian appeal for the FNPBI is being organised. Cheques payable to Indonesian Workers' Solidarity. For enquires where to send cheques, contact Workers' Liberty, P.O. Box 313, LEICHHARDT, NSW 2040, or email contact@workersliberty.org.

No Sweat in the UK has also set up a special account, send donations to "Indonesian Workers' Solidarity" c/o *No Sweat*, P.O. Box 36707, London SW9 8YA, England.

Tel: 07904 431 959
admin@nosweat.org.uk
www.nosweat.org.uk

Free Tian Chua

**Demonstrate: Wednesday 10 April,
12:30 p.m. Malaysian Airlines, Nauru House, 80 Collins Street, Melbourne**

Tian was jailed on 10 April 2001. Tian Chua is jailed under the Internal Security Act. Tian has a long history of organising workers of all races in Malaysia. Tian was the organiser of the Labour Resource Centre in Malaysia and a main activist in the democracy movement. He is in jail because he fights for the rights of all workers. Abolish the ISA! The Malaysian Internal Security Act allows the repressive Mahathir Government to jail people for up to two years without any charges being laid and without any form of trial. After two years the Government has to present a charge. The Malaysian government uses the ISA to threaten all opposition and to scare workers fighting for their rights.

Free Tian Chua — Defend the right to organise.
Australia Asia Worker Links, P.O. Box 264, Fitzroy, Vic. 3065, Australia
Tel: +61 3 9663 7277 Fax: +61 3 9662 4557
Email: aawl@ozramp.net.au
Tel: 60 3 7784 3525 Fax: 60 3 7784 3526
Email: wkpeng@pc.iaring.my
Web: www.suaram.org/isa/index.htm

16 April 2002 – general strikes in Italy and India

Italy

Cath Fletcher

Up to 20 million people joined the general strike in Italy yesterday, a turn-out of 90%, according to the unions. Nearly half a million demonstrated in Florence, where CGIL leader Sergio Cofferati addressed a rally.

The biggest turnouts were in industry (95% in the Veneto and Lazio regions), transport and the public sector. Most banks, offices, schools and factories were closed. Small and medium-sized businesses such as shops were apparently less affected - but then they are less likely to be unionised. Confindustria (bosses' organisation) is claiming a turnout of 60% for the strike.

Moderate union leader Salvino Pezzotta (from the Catholic-based CSIL) is saying it is time to re-open negotiations with the government. The more militant CGIL is saying the government must drop its plans to scrap article 18 (which protects job security) before it will negotiate.

The centre-left opposition leader Francesco Rutelli turned up to show his face at one of the rallies but did not speak on the platform.

Background to Italy

Lucy Clement

Three million workers took to the streets of Rome on 23 March. In what was probably Italy's biggest ever demonstration, they protested against Government plans to scrap job protection laws. A general strike has been called by Italy's three trade union federations for Tuesday 16 April.

Liberazione, the newspaper of Italy's socialist party Rifondazione, called Saturday's demonstration "extraordinary". The day would go down in history.

But this is just the start of a battle between unions and Government. President Silvio Berlusconi wants to scrap a law known as Article 18, which protects the job security of workers in firms with more than 15 employees — more than 40% of Italy's workforce. Along with Tony Blair, Berlusconi is leading moves within the European Union towards a more "flexible", less secure labour market. If the Italian unions can derail his plans, it will be a victory for workers across Europe.

The 16 April general strike will be the first full-day general strike in Italy for nearly 20 years. The last was in 1982, over the scrapping of the link between wages and prices, although there was a four-hour general strike during the 1994 Berlusconi Government over economic restructuring.

Just three days before 23 March, though, it looked as if the demonstration might be called off. On Tuesday 19th, Marco Biagi, an economics professor and government advisor who had drafted the changes to Article 19, was shot dead by a left-wing terrorist group. The "Red Brigades for the Building of the Fighting Communist Party" said they had killed him in order to shift forward the class struggle and to put autonomous proletarian political interests on a strong base.

The Government immediately called on the unions to call off any actions. The leaders of the moderate federations, CSIL (which has a Catholic base) and UIL (social-democratic), wavered. BuCGIL, the biggest and most left-wing of the unions — formerly dominated by the Communist Party — decided to press ahead with its mass demonstration on Saturday 23rd. It added a slogan condemning terrorism and cancelled a carnival which had been planned to run alongside the demo. And three million people took to the streets.

The response from Berlusconi's allies was panicked and furious. Several Government ministers tried to pin the blame for Biagi's killing on the unions. Reform Minister and leader of the right-wing Northern League, Umberto Bossi, said the terrorists were "the children of an exasperated protest from the trade unions". Defence Minister, Antonio Martino, called the demonstration "a threat to democracy". The unions — CSIL and UIL now firmly on side again — refused to join talks with the Government and employers' organisation, Confindustria, until the ministers apologised. But a sheepish apology from Berlusconi himself was derided as too little, too late; the unions walked out and the talks were cancelled.

Trade unionists and socialists would do well to watch events in Italy. Last Saturday's demonstration shows what can be done by a trade union movement with a leadership prepared to take on the Government and lead its members in a fight. And this is a fight for workers across Europe: to defend our rights against the neoliberal agenda of the EU. Its first demonstration has more than matched the mobilisations around the French strikes of 1995. This is a model for a European workers' movement.

10 million fight privatisation in India

Leon Parissi

India's banking operations were shut down, air and train transport were severely disrupted, and most major ports could not load or unload. Close to 10 million workers in the state owned sector struck against the government's privatisation plans, and legislation to make it easier to sack workers. The Government has already sold off VSNL, India's telecommunications company, and wants to privatise two public oil companies, the state car manufacturer, and an aluminium company.

The Indian Government has been pushing through economic reforms for the last 11 years, and is now facing mounting opposition, and showing signs of making some small concessions. The Finance Minister recently reversed planned cuts in subsidies on fuel and fertiliser products.

India's parliament has been disrupted already when The Lower House, or Lok Sabha, was adjourned 2 days running in response to intense criticism of the Government's support for the Gujerat state government's handling of communal violence. Over 20 key economic bills are being held up, including proposals to limit union rights, restructure the power industry and tighten government spending.

All-India Trade Union Congress led the strike. Union leaders plan to meet in early May to plan the next steps in their campaign.

Democracy and the labour movement

Why aren't the unions socialist?

The Wran Inquiry has been consulting Labor supporters and critics so that Simon Crean can try to figure out how to win the next election. Crean is impressed by Tony Blair's New Labour in Britain. Since Blair has slashed the scope for unions to call Labour to account, Crean has declared his desire to achieve the same effect in Australia by cutting the proportion of union delegates to ALP State conferences, which in most cases is 60%. Some socialists, especially the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), are under the misapprehension that if Crean were to succeed in this project, it would be a gift to the left, into whose open arms a liberated flock of disgruntled union officials would fall. Victorian Electrical Trades Union leader, Dean Mighell's defection to the Greens is not a move towards socialism. Mighell ignored the Socialist Alliance (SA) entirely. Whether deliberately or accidentally, it is in effect a criticism of the Alliance. He has stated that if anyone started a political party representing what is clearly just old Labor policy, they could "certainly easily get one up and running." (*Workers Online* no. 129). As if the SA does not exist.

So, why, if socialism is really in the interests of the working class, are the unions not socialist? Even disgruntled union leaders criticising Labor for being too big business oriented are not socialist, at least not in public where it counts.

This article by Janet Burstall argues that the labour movement cannot be socialist if it is not far more democratic. It is based on a discussion held in February in the Workers' Liberty Sydney series on the theme: Is democracy dead?

The trade union movement is not socialist and democracy in the movement is limited. Why isn't the trade union movement socialist, and what is the connection between democracy and socialism in the labour movement? This is illustrated in reverse by the connection between union bureaucracy and conservatism.

The trade unions generally, even early last century, were recognised by the Communist International as having become a force for co-option of the workers in accepting capitalism at the same time as, and *in a contradictory way*, being the key mass organisations for industrial class struggle. In Australia the system of arbitration gave the state the mythical role of the 'neutral umpire', which lives to this day on the basis that *sometimes* its decisions are not entirely what the bosses want.

Careerism & bureaucracy

A key element of this stabilising and integrating role has been the development of a labour movement bureaucracy. This layer of career officials have better pay, more autonomy and more influence than the average union member, and an incentive to stay in office regardless of political support – i.e. to be undemocratic. The 'wannabes' sometimes have to choose between currying favour with leaders who may groom them as successors, or else risk damaging their prospects if they insist on adherence to democratic principles. The ALP is very much part of this system.

This is to say, there is an inherently undemocratic layer holding office in the labour movement. (Though not *all* officials are necessarily so, it is very difficult to be an official who is consistently democratic). At the same time, there are many democratic mechanisms in the union movement, much more so than in industry and the public service for example.

Some manifestations of lack of democracy are:

- The ALP-ACTU Accord of 1983, and the undemocratic way in which it was imposed on the union movement. The Accord was enforced at the cost of destroying some unions (BLF and Airline Pilots) and leaving a legacy of disillusion. It has been blamed in part for the declining rate of union density in Australia.

- There is a drive to 'settle' disputes, rather than hold out for a win. Fighting on is hard work. Officials commonly commit to agreements negotiated with bosses without referring the full details for discussion and voting to workers, and at times there is official obstruction of workers who reject an agreement.

- A history of rigging in union elections means that it has become routine for the Australian Electoral Commission to conduct union elections.

- Top union officials receive undisclosed incomes or undeclared fees for directorships.

There have been some successes for assertion of the will of the rank and file through labour movement structures. In so far as the NSW ALP is at all democratic, the unions who opposed electricity privatisation were able to use NSW ALP conference to prevent Treasurer Egan from privatising electricity. This success is the exception, which shows how limited accountability is within the unions and the ALP. Workers' Compensation cuts were not stopped. And Egan has begun new schemes for achieving similar results to privatisation of electricity.

Militancy

Democracy within the labour movement can not be fought as a stand-alone issue – its significance is revealed when there are commitments to policies or demands which are opposed or subverted by the ruling group.

Militancy, clear immediate campaigns and demands, and adoption of a political platform, all need union democracy to be effective.

Democracy gives members control over people taking leadership roles. The rank and file cannot hold leadership to account if they do not have full knowledge of what is going on. If leaders cannot be held accountable, they tend to form a separate independent and conservative layer, without democracy.

Democracy, which depends on collective and majority decision-making, makes it possible for collective and conscious commitment to union campaigns and demands, and thus forms a stronger collective will to win.

The strong emergence of Labor4Refugees shows that political struggle in the ALP is not over. A number of trade union leaders and Labor politicians have been shamed into wanting to change ALP policy on refugees. Any strong commitment to change policy throws up questions of organisation, power and structure – which socialists must answer with a call for democracy.

Policies and demands cannot be campaigned for properly without democracy. What use would it be, for example, to simply get a number of unions, union leaders, politicians, to endorse a change in refugee policy, if the policy was opposed by the majority of members? We must also go about trying to win committed and active support from the rank and file, and make sure that votes can be taken at forums of rank and file delegates. Otherwise, the inevitable opponents of refugee rights will have easy ammunition to launch a reversal of any of our successes, not to mention to build support for their own politics more broadly.

Unfortunately, Unions@Work, the ACTU blueprint for regenerating unionism says very little about the importance of democratic decision making or the accountability of officials. And the union leaders such as Doug Cameron from the AMWU, now complaining to the Wran Commission about the ALP's failure to represent workers, do not propose mechanisms for increased accountability of leaders within the union movement.

Socialism as self- emancipation

Socialists have more powerful reasons for making a principle of working-class democracy. If socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class, then socialism needs democracy. Collective self-activity is impossible without a means for collective and conscious decision-making – democracy. The education of the working class in socialist politics, even just to question the status quo, cannot happen without free exchange of ideas within the movement. A democratic labour movement demonstrates embryonic features of a future society of democratic socialism. Workers can learn by practising democracy on a small scale, which can be generalised in a society where property is collectively owned.

Democratic reforms alone will not mobilise an apathetic membership or unleash an unconscious instinct for class struggle and socialism. But it is a tired old excuse of union leaders, and indeed of all oligarchs, that they are bound to take a conservative stand because it's "in line" with membership views. In a democratic union is the chance to consider all points of view, to know that leaders can be held to account, and that collective decisions will be enacted, that can give members confidence that there is a point in participating. And a democratic union also makes it possible for socialists in the union to put their case, to get a hearing, to test their ideas and to succeed or fail on the basis of their ability to convince the rank and file of a socialist perspective.

A democratic labour movement looks like this.

- Elected representatives are subject to recall, frequent elections, no special privileges, and average pay and conditions of those they represent.

- Free speech, free publication, open debate flourish. The union provides forums for election candidates to put their ideas equally, without the need for vast fund-raising efforts, and there is no scope for rich factions to win by out-spending less wealthy candidates.

- Collective decision-making, is based on hearing arguments collectively, not isolated, individualised decision-making, such as postal ballots for industrial action.

- Major decisions, especially deals to resolve industrial disputes, are debated and voted on by members affected, defined as broadly as possible.

- Officials and delegates refuse to join in secret negotiations with management or owners. The best ever example of refusing secret negotiations was at Gdansk in Poland in the early 1980s when shipyard workers *en masse* listened to negotiations amplified over loud speakers.

- Union conferences are held at least annually, democratically delegated with decision-making power binding on officials, and open to all members to attend.

- Participation of under-represented or oppressed groups of members, such as women, indigenous, non-English speaking members, is encouraged with inclusive practices, e.g. meetings in work time, caucuses, designated organisers.

As an organisational fix, union disaffiliation from the ALP does absolutely nothing to make unions more democratic or socialist. It gives a look of doing something, responding to anger and disillusion with Labor, and so may satisfy some in the short term. But it can only sound plausible to socialists while there is a low level of struggle, industrial or political, by the working class. The ALP's death-knell sounders can only maintain credibility if Crean succeeds in his Blair-isation project of cutting the ALP loose from the unions. If Crean fails and class struggle erupts, then the DSP's disaffiliation advocacy will leave it at the margins, or they will have to develop a belief in resurrection or a quick case of amnesia, in order to get on the bandwagon of serious political struggle in the labour movement. And labour movement democracy will be a key component for socialists and rank and file class struggle activists to have a chance of wresting control of the movement from the strangulation of the bureaucracy.

The official grip of bureaucratic conservatism on the machinery of the unions may be too tight for rank and file to ever reclaim the unions. But this can't be predicted in advance of such a struggle, or else we isolate ourselves from both the immediate struggles of unions and from workers who, when "aroused from slumbers", will try first to use their existing organisations for their cause.

www.workersliberty.org/australia

Russia

Women sweatshop workers defy labor law and win

April 2002

The workers at the Lipchanka sweatshop garment factory in Lipetsk, 300 km south-east of Moscow, have won a victory after they defied the new Labor Code brought in by Putin last winter, and went on strike. The action is sure to inspire other Russian workers to refuse to accept this legislation which condemns them to starve.

The boss at Lipchanka had delayed payment of several months wages, intimidated the union activists, coerced workers into signing statements that they were taking "voluntary" unpaid leave, and finally forced the remaining staff to take on their workload at no extra pay. It was the last straw. The workers, mostly women and many of them single mothers, went on strike. Within 24 hours of the strike, the boss surrendered, paid all debts and agreed to return previous working norms.

Under the draconian new Labor Code brought in last December, only those actions supported by over 50% of the entire workforce in any enterprise are now legal. As most strikes in Russia do not fulfil this requirement, it puts the overwhelming majority of actions outside the law. Yet the women showed great courage in defying this unjust Code, refusing to accept their situation.

Since the restoration of the market system, non-payment of wages has become extremely common in Russia. Sometimes workers wait a year for money owed. Payment in kind, such as coffins or condoms, already very widespread, has now officially become legal under the new Code.

The majority of Lipchanka workers live in grinding poverty. Wage delays meant that many were paid less than \$10 for the entire month of February. Meanwhile their boss lives in a luxurious villa, and the western firms who outsource their clothing here, including well-known brand names from the USA and Germany, make huge profits.

Sergei Chekrygin, an independent labor journalist collaborating with ISWoR, recently visited Lipchanka. He describes the conditions at the factory.

Chekrygin reports: "In the summer, the temperature on the shop floor reaches 37 deg. C. The women pour water on themselves as they work, in order not to lose consciousness."

With conditions like these, the miserable wage levels and a 60-hour working week in the summer, the women of Lipchanka have every reason to continue their fight. If so, they will need not only the support and solidarity of other workers in Russia, but of the international labor community.

The RUSSIA INFO-LIST puts out information and analysis from a wide range of sources.
contact: >ISWoR@aol.com<
Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London, SE5 8RZ, England
<http://members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/news/lipchanka.html>

Join Workers' Liberty in the struggle for socialism!

In Workers' Liberty we read, write, discuss, learn, vote on our ideas, publish a monthly magazine.

We conduct work in trade unions and working-class solidarity movements and invite you to join with us in these activities.

Sydney: 0419 493421, Melbourne: 0400 877819

Email: contact@workersliberty.org

Web: www.workersliberty.org/australia

Refugee solidarity

12-year old white girl taken into custody in Port Hedland

UNDERAGE ACTIVIST

*During the Christmas holidays, 12-year old Shannon Robey hopped on a bus with her mother, Marie, and her twenty-year old brother, and joined a tour of Australia's detention centres. It was not what she expected. Shannon turned down other requests for interviews, and spoke exclusively with **Liz Macnamara for Workers' Liberty**. (Extended interview at www.workersliberty.org/australia/Newsletter/Apr02/)*

Well, my mother told me that she'd heard some stuff about the Freedom Bus, and she asked me if I'd like to join. And I asked her what it was about and she said it's about people in detention centres, and I didn't really have any idea what that was about, and she said we'd go around Australia and I thought that's pretty cool: to go round Australia. I had no idea people were actually being locked up.

Villawood

And so when we go to the first centre, which was at Villawood, I saw the fences, and there were ten ACM guards that processed us and I went, Oh this is going to be pretty bad. We saw the fences, and they were like 18-feet high and razor wire, and then there were more fences behind that. So I started getting the picture then, of what was going on then, that this wasn't going to be a happy little journey round Australia. It was going to be pretty full on.

Woomera

We went out to Woomera and we came to a roadblock ten kilometres from the detention centre. There was a fence, 7-feet high. It was just like a normal highway, with desert all around. You could see for ages, the horizon, and bushes, just little tiny bushes with spikes on them all around.

We stopped and they said, 'You can't go through, it's Commonwealth land.' So we decided to set up camp. We made helium balloons and glow sticks and kites and put them up so the people in the detention centre could see them. We got a phone call [from the detainees at Woomera] and they said, 'Thank you very much for coming.' They could see everything and they were really excited. And they said, 'Please stay, we really want to be with you.' And so we stayed one night.

During the night I overheard on the [CB] radio that a thirteen-year old girl had slit her wrists and an elderly man had really bad chest pains and they wouldn't get a doctor. One of the guards said, 'No, no, it costs too much and all the people out the front will know something's wrong.'

So I just stayed on the tarmac and Mum told me to get off the tarmac, because there were big trucks coming along, there were dozens of big trucks and I wouldn't move from there. So we put a bed there and we listened to the radio the whole night and there was heaps going on. People were going nuts: the ACM was playing really, really loud music so everybody could hear it and they were being isolated. I was really upset, this was the first time I'd heard it on the radio like that, and I was really upset.

The next morning there was a bus with kids on that came through, young detainees that were going into town, and we waved to them, and they were all really young children, and they were being let out for the day and they were so happy. There were twenty of them, or thirty of them, all their faces all up against the bus window, all smiling and waving and clapping. So we started playing drums and waving at them and singing and saying, 'We love you,' And they were yelling out messages to us. I was so excited, I really wanted to meet children in the detention centres, and we hadn't seen any children the whole time, and they were so happy to see us.

Port Hedland

On Australia Day, we were supposed to get visiting rights. We turn up, but ACM wouldn't let us in. There were five police cars and one of them went round the back. They often take people through the fence and transfer them or deport them, so we went running round the back.

Round the back eventually there were about three hundred and fifty people lined up along this fence; there were women and children and babies and an eighty-year old lady and they started telling us their stories all at once.

So we started to get their numbers first, we went along and asked them for their numbers and they started writing us letters and chucked them over. Everyone was grabbing the letters and reading it and we put it in a safe place and they kept on chucking us letters.



We'd been there about four hours and they said, 'You people go, go. You're not used to it here. It's too hot. You're not used to the weather. You're not used to the heat.' And we said, 'We want to stay with you.' And they said, 'No, go, it's ok. Come back later when it's cool.' And we said, 'No, we're staying here, we're not moving.'

So we went and got our rug and laid it out there and everyone was cheering.

And we got a tarp and tied it up there, so we could have some shade, and they started chucking these freezing cold bottles of water over and fruit, sandwiches, everything they could – their hats, toys for me, flowers, everything.

There's no shade whatsoever. There's a playground — one of those little plastic slippery slides not even a metre long. They had one of them in the middle of the desert with no shade or anything. I didn't see any grass anywhere; there was all dirt, that was it, all I could see. There were little kids trying to talk to us and they were throwing us letters and they were crying. They telling us about their older siblings or their mothers trying to hang themselves and going on hunger strikes, and we saw later on this man came out and he had his lips sewn up; many of the others wouldn't come out.

We'd been there for about eight hours and the police told us to move on. We were really confused because they said we were starting a riot. We were singing, Natasha [Verco] was singing in Spanish and playing guitar, and Penny [Birch] was playing the drum and we were all just humming along, clapping our hands to it. Every single person who was there, they all sat down and they were all smiling, there was not one peep out of anybody, even the tiny little children who looked like they were just born, there was no crying or anything, there was pure silence. And then the police told us we were causing a riot. We said, 'How are we

causing a riot? We're quiet as.' And then the police started arresting us.

The police had already arrested Penny and Natasha, and then they asked me to move away from the fence and I was going on my way when a boy threw me a letter so, naturally, I went and picked it up and I started reading it and at that time they said, That's it, you're under arrest. So I went with them, 'cause I was really stunned that they were going to arrest me and Mum was right next to the paddy wagon getting legal advice and Mum went, You can't arrest my daughter, you gave me no warning, you didn't tell me to get her away. And she started going off and wanted to know how to get arrested. She was going around saying, How do I get arrested? How do I get in the back of the paddy wagon? She was grabbing the door of the paddy wagon and shaking it and everything trying to get inside. And I'm going, Mum, Mum, it's ok. And they wouldn't tell her and they wouldn't arrest her. She was crying and upset and I was crying at this stage, really shocked.

We got to the back door of the police station and they took me into a separate room, and I was dealt with by an officer and I gave him my name and my age and where I live, and he gave me a juvenile caution.

After about four hours – the bus had broken down so nobody could come and pick us up – my Father rang up and he's like, 'Where's my daughter?' and he was going off at the police and I'm like, 'That must be my Dad'. And he started talking to me and he asked me if I was all right and stuff like that and I said, 'Yes'.

About an hour later the police drove me back to my Mum and she was so upset and really happy to see me. Like really upset about me being arrested and really happy to have me back.

Bellingen

Back at school I found out who my true friends were. They really helped me out. Some of them just can't get used to it and still think the refugees are terrorists or not human. Some of them have changed their mind and I've got friends who are actually writing to detainees, which is really good.

Kids can get involved. Email rac_bellingen@bigpond.com, and get detainees' details and just write to them. There's heaps of kids to write to. That's what I'm doing, just writing and ringing once a week or once a month or whatever you can afford.

Melissa White in South America

Argentina: workers, socialists and neighbourhood

The scene

A great deal of the revolutionary tension contained in the confrontation of the Argentinean masses with the Argentinean state in Buenos Aires in December has subsided, but the present period is still characterised by a generalised instability and social unrest flowing from the material consequences of the official delinking of the Argentine peso from the US dollar. The devaluation of the currency has driven up the prices of goods, since imports still have to be paid at their full value — the Government has begun applying selective rationing on items such as rice, toilet paper and bottled water. The devaluation of the currency has also caused a flood of European and American capital to enter the country as the big corporations snap up the newly privatised social services at bargain prices — thereby driving up the market prices of goods and services. Unemployment is rising astronomically as a whole layer of the employing class skids into bankruptcy — unemployment stands at 25% and that is only the official figure, neglecting the number of people engaged in part-time employment only. There is an assault on civil liberties driven by the Government's desire to curb the unrest — this latter should not be underestimated, since the drop in expectations that occurred at the loss of basic freedoms, such as when the curfew was imposed in December, was the stimulus for the spontaneous fury of the middle-class "pot-bangers". All these factors are soil for ongoing unrest. The situation is tense.

The workers

The confrontation with the military and police on December 19 and 20 and the shooting dead of the 31 people in response to the store lootings and the rioting have scared many people in a country not unfamiliar with the naked political brutality of the state. However, this is not the main dampening force on further revolt. There are four main factors undermining further revolt.

First, for many of the reformist-minded workers, the principal problem in Argentina is the seeming collapse of stable bourgeois government. One of the things in the minds of working-class people is that such instability of the state would encourage the forces of military dictatorship to re-emerge. Argentina is experiencing its longest period in recent memory of uninterrupted elected parliamentary rule. 19 years of elected bourgeois government follows the Videla/Viola/Galtieri dictatorship lasting from 1976 to 1983, a period marked by Argentinean military adventurism in the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) and the disappearance and murder of 30,000 oppositionists. That is still present in the minds of many older workers. Many working-class elements thus see the restoration of bourgeois order after December — even via the installation of Duhalde, as the fifth actor in the endless presidential cast — as the most important task. This has, it is unfortunately true, released some of the tension that had built up.

Letter from South America

I'm in Buenos Aires, and today, with fortune upon me, is the 26th anniversary of the military coup in Argentina. There's been a demonstration brewing all day, but what I saw tonight was beyond the limits of my imagination.

A demonstration with well over 100,000 people, and even close to 200,000, emerged on the street between the Palace and the Congress (about 3km in length). The surrounding blocks and the road between the palace were crammed full of people as far as the eye could see. At one point, it genuinely looked as if the MST would start the charge on the Congress with a bus.

They did drive the bus up through the square and to the Congress, with some trucks following. There was a massive rush by the spearheading groups to the Congress. It seemed the whole weight of the demonstration would crack the city in half. In fact, I was convinced at one point that this was it, there was no going back. But, clearly, the bulk of the working class is not yet there to bring down the Government decisively. There is absolutely no military around. At the spot where the 31 people were shot on 20th December, the PTS and the occupying textile workers they're leading let off fireworks guns etc. The square is now wrecked. A lot is now is wrecked. McDonalds etc. has been trashed.

The 'popular assemblies' are turning into something, but as yet the workers there are there as neighbours, not as workers. There are 100 assemblies within BA Centro alone. They were represented there tonight. Banners made it clear what was what. Last weekend there was a mass conference of the assemblies, and they have elected to become a "constituent assembly". There is fierce fighting between MST and PO about what to do next. A large part of the demonstration - the unemployed workers' movement - turned up armed.

This was the biggest shock of all. The go was planks of wood with handles attached about three feet long, ranging from metal pickets to axe handles. No guns that I saw.

I'm completely exhausted as I've been at it for about nine hours and had no sleep on the bus here from Paraguay last night, so sorry if what I say is sketchy at best. I'm in a hurry to go back. Tonight is an all-night affair it seems. The left here is enormous. There is every tendency imaginable represented.

I finally found the PTS and I'm to meet them tomorrow at 5 p.m. I would say that this Government is on the skids, and if the syndicates (TUs) come on board with a general strike, this will only be a matter of a couple of weeks. There are unanimous political demands across many groups now (from "society of medical students" to "neighbourhood assembly of suburb X"): namely, stop prices rising.

Melissa White

25 March 2002

assemblies



Second, escalating unemployment has instilled fear, timidity and class-collaborationism into the working class, further dampening its involvement in the social revolt.

Third, serious culprits responsible for the indifference of the workers, are the trade union confederations. A general strike was called by both the "official" and by the so-called "dissident" wings of the General Labour Confederations (CGT) and the Argentine Workers' Congress (CTA) for December, but, whilst the official CGT leader Rodolfo Daer and Dissident CGT leader Hugo Moyano denounced the measures imposed by the Government, they went on to make an agreement with the Government to stamp on the social revolt "in the interests of the country", arguing that "people do not want any more strikes". It is true that many people don't want more strikes, because if they are applied ineffectively (as they have been), they only undermine the unity of the working class and pit elements of the working class against one another as weaker elements undermine the strike by returning to work. They called off the 48-hour strike that had been announced under nationalist pretences. When the confederations led by Moyano and Daer eventually called a strike – for the following day – hundreds had already been arrested and several people had been killed.

Fourth, there is a failure of the anti-Stalinist Trotskyist left to have a powerful enough influence or to offer the plausible leadership required to really shake the working class from its cautious response or influence a rank-and-file movement against the Peronist leadership in the union confederations.

The Neighbourhood Assemblies

As a result, the revolutionary possibilities are now mostly confined to whatever can be achieved from the increasingly defensive measures. It is still true that things are politically critical in Buenos Aires, but so far the hard left groups advocating an emergency plan as a link in the chain towards a workers' government have had limited success in altering the composition of forces in the neighbourhood assemblies, which, along with the fabulously militant unemployed workers' movement, are the main oppositional forces against the Argentinean state working in any on-going and organised manner. The neighbourhood assemblies are still largely comprised of middle-class elements — well-paid workers with savings, small employers, self-employed individuals — who have broken with the bipartisan political policies of the Radicals and the Peronists for the management of the capitalist crisis of deep indebtedness, largely because both have sought a solution to the inflation in the bank savings of the middle class. The middle classes cry out every day for a hard-line Keynesian bourgeois government to solve this problem. Neither the Peronists nor the Radicals are prepared to pay the debt: neither will take from the generals, and neither, at least for the present, will pay at the expense of the working class via even tougher austerity measures. If they do the latter, there will be immediate revolt and perhaps, as some of the Trotskyist groups suggest, civil war in Argentina. There is stalemate between the middle classes and the Government. President Duhalde may just wait it out before striking at the working class.

Nevertheless, apart from the disaffected middle class, workers, unemployed, students, the Mothers of the Disappeared, are all components of the neighbourhood assemblies, and the assemblies have at last agreed to make unanimous political demands upon the Duhalde government, such as, drop the external debt to the IMF (although it is not mentioned that this should not occur at the expense of the working class, and that when the IMF inevitably knocks at Argentina's door to recoup its debt, it should be at the expense of the generals). Some Trotskyists mistakenly call this unanimity of demands across the assemblies a "constituent assembly". "Constituent Assembly", literally, means a parliament mandated to draft a constitution; what they mean, presumably, is that the network of assemblies is beginning to "constitute" a new, working-class, political order. It is true that there are genuine efforts to organise a system of welfare at the level of the town halls, run privately by citizens. But it is false to say that the neighbourhood assemblies are organising to seize power from the state by posing a challenge to the legitimacy of the bourgeois democracy of the rotten Government. Further, the movement to call fresh and immediate elections, stemming from the neighbourhood assemblies, seems to have lost some impetus as a result of the Government fighting it down in December.

To date, the workers in the assemblies are represented not as workers, but as individuals. There is no delegates system of representation from the workplaces and factories. Some participants of the assemblies conceive of the assemblies as forums in which to air every possible grievance about the neighbourhood, rather than as forums of organisation which seek to tackle the major, overarching problem from which the smaller problems flow. Until these two conditions are met, it is, for the present, hard to see that the neighbourhood assemblies could be a platform from which the working-class overthrow of the state could be launched.

Trotskyist Groups

The two biggest Argentinean Trotskyist groups, the MST (Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores) and the PO (Partido Obrero) — both with big militant cores of activists running into the thousands — seem too uncritical about the neighbourhood assemblies, following from the populist deviations in their politics, in which they see the working class as one spice amongst many in the revolutionary stew, rather than as the decisive ingredient.

Until the MST and PO achieve a clearer focus on the central revolutionary role of the working class, organised as a class, then it is hard to see what they can achieve other than fighting each other for political hegemony in the assemblies. Those comrades need to re-acquaint themselves with the fact that the whole of the labouring activity of capitalist society is necessarily socialised. Yet the product of that labouring activity is not socialised, making capitalism nothing more than an historical mode of slave society. This fact of socialised labour/privatised product of labour not only determines that class is pitted against class in irreconcilable difference, but also determines that the working class is the decisive lever in mobilising revolutionary war against the "everyday fascism", suffering and banality of Argentinean capitalism.

Both the MST and PO are feting the neighbourhood assemblies, courting them assiduously. The MST and PO are hostile to one another. Nevertheless, both have an uncannily similar assessment of the neighbourhood assemblies! Yet, they refuse to make a tactical alliance with one another in trying to build up the neighbourhood

assemblies into Soviet-type formations, if at all possible. The reason cited by the PO for their refusal to work with the MST is that the MST is in a ten-year long electoral alliance with the PC (Partido Comunista: the old Stalinists) and each hopes to capture the movement. Does the PO have grounds to remain aloof to the MST on the basis that the latter works with the Stalinists? The MST is not Stalinist despite the electoral alliance in the so-called "Izquierda Unida". Further, it doesn't make a lot of sense to remain aloof, since the fact stands that the Stalinist left is so utterly (and thankfully) in tatters after 1991 that the PO is liable to make a straw principle out of their attitude to the MST on the basis of anti-Stalinism. What stupid sectarianism, and at a critical time! The MST can remain aloof to the PO partly because it is the much bigger organisation, partly because it is prestigious for organising massive revolt against legislation, passed under Menem, to let the murdering generals off the hook for the political disappearances during the dictatorship, partly because its unity project with the PC gives it real access to the working class that the PO don't have. MST believes it is superior.

More Trotskyists

The PTS (Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo). The Proposal for an Emergency Plan.

The PTS base their approach on a close adaptation of the Transitional Programme, written in 1938 by Trotsky, as a "bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution... a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat". This is heartening for Trotskyists over the whole world in terms of what we can achieve in Argentina, despite the PTS' clearly discredited politics on the semi-colony status of Argentina, flowing from their wanton definition of modern imperialism, and from their subscription to a view that disorients a lot of the "orthodox" Trotskyist movement, in which national wars are seen as instruments of class struggle instead of internecine wars of the working class based in different nations. Why?

The PTS share with the MST and PO the idea that Argentina is a "semi-colony", ruled by "imperialism" in the same way as states like Egypt and Iraq, formally independent, were before the 1950s dominated by the British Empire. But "imperialism" is not a state, a political centre. Argentina is certainly part of the world empire of big capital — like all other countries — and a relatively weak and disadvantaged one. But "economic independence" is quite distinct from political independence. Political independence is possible, and Argentina has had it since the early 19th century. "Economic independence" is impossible in the modern world; the attempt to achieve it, i.e. shutting a country's economy off from international connections, is undesirable and retrograde. The notion that Argentina is a "semi-colony" leaves many Argentine Trotskyists chasing after a populist "struggle for national independence" or for a "second independence", and losing focus on the struggle against the Argentine workers' "main enemy at home", the Argentine capitalist class.

Nevertheless, below is part of their statement of 24 December, 2001, which Workers' Liberty would also work to implement if we were in Argentina and in a position to do so:

"Only a program cutting deep into the bosses' profits and capitalist property altogether, expropriating the expropriators, shall be up to the task of meeting the burning needs of the masses. The flagrant contradiction between millions of starving people on one hand, supermarkets stuffed with goods on the other, is a vivid picture of the deep contradictions at work in the capitalist régime: the few concentrate in their hands a staggering wealth whereas the majority barely survives.

A first emergency measure should be the seizure of the stocks of food in the supermarkets as a part of the struggle against hunger. The distribution of food should be organised and controlled by committees in the neighbourhoods and the pickets' organisations. This emergency measure should be directed towards the goal of nationalising the food distribution companies under workers' control.

But putting an end to hunger demands putting an end to mass unemployment. The measures of the Government do not provide any real solution in this regard. We should fight for the distribution of all working hours among the unemployed with a salary equal to the cost of living for an average family.

An emergency public works plan must be launched to feed, to house, educate and provide medical care, all under control of the workers and picketers. All sackings must be stopped right now, and every factory or workplace that goes into bankruptcy and sacks its workers should be nationalised under the direct management of its workers. We could start right now with crisis-ridden companies such as Neuquén's Zanón, Renacer in Tierra del Fuego province, EmFer in the province of Buenos Aires, or the sugar mill La Esperanza in the province of Jujuy. On top of this, nationwide control of production by the workers shall be implemented, to prevent the bosses from benefitting from the crisis. All privatised utilities should be re-nationalised under the control of customers' committees, as well as private pension funds.

The task of the hour is not to go for a foreign debt moratorium, a measure the new Rodríguez Saa Government has taken out of sheer necessity [*this was written before the fall of the Saa Government - ed.*], but the country should renounce the external debt altogether. Argentina must break away from the IMF, and nationalise the banking system to guarantee the deposits of up to \$100,000, prevent a massive outflow and hand in cheap credits to small farmers and ruined shopkeepers. The state monopoly on foreign trade must be brought in to prevent the bosses from manoeuvring with cash flows.

Such are the elementary measures of an emergency plan of workers and the people, one that should be democratically voted for by the workers and the people, thus finishing off the anarchy of capitalist production.

All of these would be a genuinely progressive solution for the majority that ousted De la Rúa from the Government. In the fight for their demands, the workers, as the dramatic events in these days have once again shown, will come up against the repressive forces of the capitalist state.

First, we should demand the release of all those jailed for fighting, and in the name of the 31 brothers and sisters killed, we should demand the police and the repressive forces be disbanded. We must build self-defense pickets that should end in the setting up of a workers' militia."

More information is available from: www.pts.org.ar
www.geocities.com/argentinesc, and www.po.org.ar

Melissa White in South America (cont'd)

My first month in São Paulo

Sunny and baroque is how I thought São Paulo would be. The Tropic of Capricorn and Portuguese colonisation had me quite sure of this. I hadn't had any preconceptions about the 17 million inhabitants of São Paulo. Deranged, deformed, drug-crazed, toothless, drunk, diseased, unconscious human beings lie all over Praça da Republica every night. Some night owls split open black garbage bags, looking for tin cans and other useful items. Dogs wait patiently to see if there's anything inside for them, too.

Outside my apartment, there are people who have clearly reached the end of the line. They sleep where they drop. That includes the median strip of the eight-lane freeway. There seems to be a group of between four and eight living permanently under the tree on that median strip. At the corner "lanchonete" (snack bar) is a man with both his arms amputated, sleeping under a table with his head in the gutter. He hasn't got long left. Children beg from drivers at traffic lights. There are no foreign tourists in São Paulo. There is nothing here that contributes to the cause of tourism. There are, however, expatriates working for the big international firms. They live alongside the confirmed wealthy Paulistas, in and around the suburb of Pinheiros. Last week I walked through there on a short cut. Double-storey mansions with gardens and cars parked in

driveways. At the corner of each block there are security guards in booths, screening the entry of visitors. I was not stopped, presumably because I am Western and white.

There is a gross disproportion between women and men on the streets. The crowds must be made up of 80% men. In some places in the states of north-east Brazil, I have read that the men outnumber the women by nine to one. Where are the women? Women from the favelas (slums) will be working, engaged as empracadas (maids). Middle-class women are in evidence at the shopping centres. But I am at a loss to explain the rest of the absence. I've also tried averting my eyes from the fact that whilst Brazil is one of the most sexually permissive and tolerant countries I've ever visited, no form of feminism seems to accompany that. São Paulo is not unmitigated misery. There is an electrifying air in the city. The reality here is overwhelmingly human. There is no pretension about the people, no self-righteousness. But the poorest are completely abandoned — nobody looks after them. Those who live in the slums, stretching hours in every direction from São Paulo, are workers, and they stick closely together. The middle classes are seen only by day. The rich are never seen at all.

Workers' Liberty

Invites you to discuss

Parliament at breaking point: Chile 1972-1975 & Russia 1917

**7.30pm Monday 6 May
The Green Iguana Café (upstairs)
6 King Street (Sydney Uni end) NEWTOWN**

Both Chile and Russia reached a point where class antagonisms could no longer be contained by parliaments. In both countries, workers' committees were taking over aspects of running the economy. In the former, one of the most vicious military dictatorships ever defeated the workers and overthrew the Government of Allende. In the latter, the workers defeated the Kerensky Government and the committees/soviets took power.

What made the difference? How do we recognise when the limits of parliamentary democracy must be challenged in order for the workers' movement to survive? What are the lessons for Argentina?

Background reading for the keen

Leon Trotsky, "The First Coalition", Chapter 18 of *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. 1

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/>

Ed Boorstein, *Allende's Chile: An Inside View* (1977)

This discussion continues our educational series on democracy, working class self-organisation as the basis of socialism.

REVIEWS &

Intimacy

Reviewed by Melissa White

"Intimacy", directed by Patrice Chéreau
Principal Actors, Mark Rylance and Kerry Fox

Realism, like romanticism or surrealism, is a literary ideology. It is an unsustainable thesis to hold that realism, as a form of representation, has primacy in representing "reality" in the literary work. "Reality" is so overripe with unactualised possibility that it makes no sense to talk of its being synonymous with actuality (defined as the past) or facts. The conclusion to be drawn from this is not brainless and melodramatic: that there is no reality. That is postmodernist drivel. The conclusion to be drawn is that all literary ideologies are representational in some form. They need be so, since they require elemental reference points in the past or in facts if they are to be understood at all.

The film "Intimacy" is realistic, ideologically. It is easily the most plausible and artistically skillful presentation of a sexual relationship I have seen in film to date. A man and a woman meet once a week for sex. No questions asked, no information exchanged, neither knows anything about the other. Their sex is fast and desperate. The man begins thinking it over. He starts to wonder why the woman has no expectations of him. He cannot help but form expectations about the future, even if limited to expecting her return the following Wednesday. She must be more enlightened in her unhappiness than he. Is she? He develops an interest in the woman outside their liaisons. He begins to spy on her. He discovers nothing surprising: their encounters are extra-marital affairs for her, for example; she acts in amateur performances; she has a charming young son.

Their first conversation is an argument. He accuses her of having presented herself fraudulently. The thing the man initially found so attractive about the liaison he holds against the woman as the unsightly evidence of a deception. But she has not deceived him, since she told him no truths in the first place. He reveals his own expectations thereby. He wasn't supposed to have any. She dismisses the accusation. There was no fraudulence. All was sincere.

She accuses him of "not being like I imagined". She reveals her own expectations thereby. She should not have imagined that he was like anything. He has not been less than he should have been. He was simply himself. There was no fraudulence. All was sincere.

There is no way forward. The woman has no intention of leaving her husband, a dolt who deliberately overlooks her infidelity because, as the man aptly observes, in the marriage arrangement "it is so easy to stay". The woman cuts off the relationship after the man makes a last-bid effort to keep it going. A relationship founders, yet again, on uncommunicated and divergent expectations that have formed in the course of the liaisons. Yet, it could never have got off the ground in the first place if there had been any. Relationships have contradictory foundations.

Some people will no doubt be put off the film by the fact that the sex in the movie is not simulated. Possibly, this

is because the effect is quite jarring on the viewer, thoroughly contrary to the usual silly and easy-to-consume pornographic quality of sex scenes in films, which often contain an hysterical level of idealised psychological projection. There is certainly nothing erotic about their sex. Don't see this film expecting to get any kicks out of its raunchiness. It's entirely home-brand fucking.

Others will certainly be put off by the draining emotional content of the film. I did not find it this way — at least, not like most other English proletarian realism, which holds a simultaneous dread and fascination for the numbing emptiness and boredom of "life on the estates". The film is indeed upsetting. For the shallow-minded, it will certainly clash with the allegedly romantic content of sexual relationships. For those who get the point of this film, however, it will upset because it resonates the truth of the fundamental contradiction outlined above.

What is there to say about the objective social content of this film? The institution of the family has broken down. The return to the family on a "modern" basis is a but a reactionary alternative to the death of that oppressive institution. The move towards conducting sexual relationships as the empty physical routine, devoid of the emotional content that necessarily flows from them, is another alternative, but is also inadequate as a response to this vast social change. The film, as an exploration of the second response, is absolutely excellent. There can be no expectations about the direction in which a sexual relationship will proceed any longer. The self-regulation required may be terrifying to some. To others, it is sheer liberation. One cannot be unthinking about how to proceed in relating to people sexually on the new social basis of "the individual". The "individual" is here now, at least as long as capitalism remains.

Naomi Klein, "Farewell to the End of History"

Reviewed by Ronald F. Price

Naomi Klein, "Farewell to the End of History: Organization and Vision in Anti-Corporate Movements", in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds), *SOCIALIST REGISTER 2002 (A World of Contradictions)*, Merlin Press/Monthly Review Press.

For me, this is the most valuable item in the always thought-provoking annual collection. Mercifully free of the academic theorising which mars a few of the articles, this one combines a description of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre with critical thoughts on where the movement for an alternative world needs to go from here.

Beginning in the Brazilian State of Rio Grande, where the ruling Workers' Party played host to some 10,000 very diverse seekers-after-alternatives to the present state of the world, Klein moves through Quebec and the other cities where many of the same participants have demonstrated, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and to the Internet, which has played the organiser of much of the action.

REVIEWS &

She more than once stresses that the movement, or rather the "convergence of many smaller ones", is deeply suspicious of hierarchies, charismatic leaders and one-size-fits-all ideologies. This even showed during the Porto Alegre Forum itself, when, by day three, frustrated delegates marched and denounced the Forum leadership for "everything from reformism to sexism". Klein herself felt that "some of this criticism was unfair". But she goes on to point to a real hierarchy in the ownership and control of the computer networks which link and organise the various activists. Given the importance of the Internet for organising the movement, and for giving it shape, this is significant.

One of Klein's themes is the significance of the Zapatistas for the movement, particularly their commitment to self-determination and diversity. She notes that there is an "emerging consensus that participatory democracy at the local level is where we need to start" to build an alternative to neoliberalism. And she stresses that such a movement should involve "political diversity".

One of the major issues, at Porto Alegre and more widely, is how the movement should develop from now on. As Klein put it: "[I]f there is to be more structure, what kind should it be?" She went on to suggest possibilities: "An international political party that pushes to democratize world government? New national parties? How about a network of city and town councils each committed to introducing participatory democracy? Should it exist entirely outside of electoral politics and concentrate exclusively on creating counter-powers to the state?" [p.9]. Further on she returns to the Zapatistas, contrasting them with "typical Marxist guerilla insurgents". What they fight for, she says, is "less state power over their lives, not more". [p.12]

While the emphasis on participatory democracy and local community control is vitally important for us all and everywhere, one thing is missing in Klein's account. That is democratic control of the workplace, of the major centres of capital which control our lives. Nowhere does she spell out economic democracy, though she does say that the Zapatistas 'autonomous zones' are seen as a base from which to confront capital [p.12]. Even the successes of the movements she cites — improved conditions for workers at US student campuses, and campaigns against genetically modified foods in Europe — can be accommodated by capital. It therefore remains to be seen whether her closing sentence is the way to go: a movement of movements surrounding capital from all sides.

In the Blue House

Reviewed by Janet Burstall

In the Blue House, by Meaghan Delahunt.
London: Bloomsbury, 2001.

Leon Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, Natalia Sedova, Joseph Stalin, Ramon Mercader are the names of famous figures who populate this

novel, which revolves around the besieged household of Leon Trotsky in Coyocan, Mexico in 1939-1940.

It is a very particular look at the tension between the personal and the political. Trotsky is disconcertingly distracted by desire for Frida Kahlo, and contemplation of their brief affair, and distressed by his betrayal of Natalia his wife, upon whose love and loyalty he so depends, amor y dolor, love and pain. All the more so since the deaths of all their children, and many of their friends.

"This is the great puzzle for the revolutionary. We live for the revolution, for upheaval, for change. For the collective will and spirit. And yet when such a revolution happens to us personally, we feel that we are no longer flowing with the collective, because there is that one individual who sustained us, who is no longer", Trotsky contemplates.

And Trotsky works on a biography of Stalin, unfinished when he died. "Every day I grapple with the life story of my political enemy. Every day this forces me to look at my life, in relation to the enemy. In knowing my enemy I sharpen myself. The intimacy of enmity. How deep it is." He also contemplates the nature of friendship, affection, partnership, and compares the relationship between Marx and Engels to the relationship between himself and Lenin.

Trotsky, as a revolutionary, is literally under siege, not an unrealistic metaphor for many of us and our comrades in the second half of the 20th century. This metaphor holds a strong element of pessimism, all the more because Delahunt shows us so little of the outside world, of the working class and of the political struggles that were the basis for Trotsky's political optimism.

While Russian politics was the setting for betrayal and rivalry between Trotsky and Stalin, Trotsky's affair with Frida is Delahunt's vehicle for exploring their personal dimensions. Natalia feels how different she is from Frida, who is a grand artist, acts spontaneously, dresses flamboyantly. "She seduced my husband simply because she could...but I had won in the contest of youth and allure and beauty...and my victory gave me strength...After a lifetime in the service of Lev Davidovich (Trotsky) I knew nothing else." Yet Frida's motive for the affair with Trotsky was to punish her husband, Diego Rivera, for his affair with her sister. Frida's life revolves around Diego, as Natalia's does around Trotsky. Just as the characters objectify Frida, all that we, the readers, see of her is her alluring performance. She remains an enigma, who, in her last appearance, is distressed by Stalin's death.

Other voices narrate other chapters: Stalin's first wife, whose suicide may well have been murder by Stalin; Ramon Mercader, the murderer of Trotsky; Rosita Moreno, a Mexican folk artist and friend of Frida Kahlo; Mayakovsky, the Russian poet; Trotsky's father; Trotsky's assistant; Stalin's last doctor.

Stalin learns to survive from childhood into adulthood by lying to his superiors and betraying his peers, never trustworthy, in a vividly unpleasant series of incidents. Even in death Stalin is self-satisfied, smiling to himself "I am steel", as relief floods over the people at his deathbed..

MARCH ON MAY DAY

11am Sunday 5 May Hyde Park North

A PROUD HISTORY

May Day began in America in 1884 as part of the struggle for the eight hour day. The fight for fairer working hours was bitterly resisted by employers. In Chicago in 1886, 6 striking workers were shot on May Day. At a protest that followed, 11 people were killed.

In 1890 May Day became the international workers day and the call for '8 hours work, 8 hours play & 8 hours rest' was heard across the globe.

This struggle was won in many parts of the world shortly after, but May Day lives on. It has a proud tradition of involvement in struggles for freedom, national liberation, peace, social progress, socialism, support of indigenous & environmental issues and trade union rights.

MAY DAY SYDNEY 2002

GOOD REASONS TO MARCH

WORKERS RIGHTS Protect workers entitlements against business failure and corporate crooks. The Federal Government have taken too many rights away from working people, but are still lining up for more. Workers demand an independent industrial relations system giving people an equitable chance in defending the attacks of multi national capital on working conditions. Support more leisure time and limits on overtime.

PEACE NOW Stop the killing of innocent civilians in Afghanistan in the name of peace. International Terrorist suspects must be tried in an international court. End the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Nuclear Weapons Ban NOW!

RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES - RACISM SUCKS! Mandatory detention in desert concentration camps must stop now. People fleeing war and persecution need our help, not more torture.

GLOBALISATION FOR PEOPLE NOT PROFIT

STOP UNION BASHING-SUPPORT THE CFMEU The Cole Royal Commission into the building industry is nothing but a front to attack the CFMEU, one of the country's leading unions. MUA... CFMEU... who's next. THE WORKERS UNITED....WE'LL NEVER BE DEFEATED.

KEEP PUBLIC SERVICES PUBLIC The Privatisation of valuable community services continues. Essential services should be renationalised under public control for the public good.

HEALTH & EDUCATION The ripping of millions of dollars out of the public systems to subsidise the private must stop. Fair opportunity to a proper education should be a right, not a privilege.

JOB CREATION Unemployment is entrenched at an unacceptable level. Meaningful work addressing real problems like the Murray Darling river system is needed, not Work for the dole.

ENVIRONMENT

There are no jobs on a dead planet. Fight exploitation of the environment to protect our future. We demand a nuclear free future. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs in sustainable industries.

HISTORY SHOWS THAT UNITED ACTION ACHIEVES GREAT THINGS. IN 2002 UNITE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE.

REVIEWS &

Delahunt's understanding of the personal is much greater than her understanding of the political, although her extensive reading of the character's biographies lends authenticity to her contextual references. She is showing us how we might look back near the end of our lives as Marxists, on our personal lives as revolutionaries. Her portrayal of Trotsky's political concerns is unconvincing, in comparison to Sean Matgamna's, *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, in which Trotsky is shown grappling with the enigma of just what Russia had become, and the significance of the possible conclusions for working-class revolution in the epoch. Delahunt's clearest foray into a political issue is to present Trotsky reflecting on Kronstadt,

justifying his actions, in such a way as to cast doubt on them.

The many narrators and the scale of time and place reflect an ambition by the author to embrace the grand sweep — which is the stuff of history and revolution — although her focus is the personal and emotional, not the social and political context of the characters. It is not an easy read, but is full of convincing vignettes with characters and references to connect with and contemplate. While the names of the novel's key characters will be known to many socialist readers, the exploration of their inner lives is less familiar territory. Well worth the read.

A report from Israeli socialists

Adam Keller and Beate Zilversmidt

On the way to the Rabin Square in Tel-Aviv, the radio news told of thirty Palestinians killed today at the Jenin fighting. The commentator prefaced this piece of news with "The Palestinians allege that...". In fact, some Palestinian contacts with whom we spoke today gave much higher figures. With the army declaring the whole of Jenin "a closed military zone" and no journalists or impartial observers of any kind, it is impossible to know. What is clear is that at the Jenin Refugee Camp the army encountered an exceptionally stiff resistance from the local Palestinians — and reacted by exceptionally brutal measures designed to break that resistance before international pressures force a withdrawal. The army's armoured bulldozers are known to be destroying houses by the dozen — and by some accounts this time they are doing it while the inhabitants are still inside.

As the crowds started to gather at the Rabin Square, in preparation for the march, a group of youngsters was visible at a corner, hastily preparing placards with "Stop the war crimes in Jenin!", which were added to the more general "Stop the war/Stop the bloodshed/Get out of the Territories" provided by organisers. Soon, torches were lighted, despite the drizzling summer rain, signs and banners were picked up, and the march set off along the wide Ibn Gvirol Street — row after row were supporters of Peace Now, which organised the event, and contingents of the more radical groups such as Gush Shalom and Ta'ayush, and a significant presence of Arabs, which is not the norm in Peace Now actions.

Outside the Defence Ministry, where the march ended, a rally took place at a rather irregularly-shaped parking lot. At the edge of the crowd, where the undersigned

were distributing the popular Gush Shalom "Bring back the soldiers!" stickers, only snatches of the speeches could be heard. "The black flag of manifest illegality and flagrant immorality flies over the Sharon government and its policy". "They send the soldiers over there, to die in vain, in vain, in vain! "It is not a war against terror, it is a war of occupation and reoccupation". "Occupation and terrorism are bound up with each other, you can't end terrorism without ending occupation, and you can't end occupation without ending terrorism".

As the national anthem was sung and the crowd filed out, a white-haired man continued standing, still and straight, holding a hand-made "sign". "I served in the Palmach [pre-state militia]. I fought in the War of Independence and in the paratroopers afterwards. I lost my son, killed in vain in Lebanon. I salute the courageous men of conscience, who refuse to take part in Sharon's Lebanon War II".

Israeli press reports estimated the turnout at 7,000. Not as many as there should have been, considering the magnitude of what is happening. On the other hand, not negligible, considering how traumatised the Israeli society is after the past week's series of lethal suicide bombings, and how Sharon — with the help of his Labour Party partners — manipulated large parts of public opinion to accept military action as "the only answer to terrorism".

- Adam Keller and Beate Zilversmidt are editors of *The Other Israel* a bi-monthly peace movement magazine: pob 2542, Holon 58125, Israel; ph/fx: +972-3-5565804;
- Website http://other_Israel.tripod.com

Mining and Maritime unions call for sanctions against Israel

"The national leaders of the mining and maritime unions have issued a joint call for the Federal Government to impose sanctions against Israel until the Sharon Government ceases its occupation of Palestinian territories in line with United Nations Resolutions. In a statement issued today, CFMEU (Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union) Mining and Energy General President, Tony Maher, and MUA (Maritime Union of Australia) National Secretary, Paddy Crumlin, said: "The Israeli government is flagrantly violating the rights of the Palestinian people by invading and occupying their territories in breach of international laws and UN Resolutions. Australia and the international community must firmly condemn this violation of international law and back it up with action. We call on the Federal Government to impose sanctions against Israel until it withdraws from the occupied territories. We believe Israel's immediate withdrawal is essential to ending the bloodshed, slaughter and tragedy and creating the conditions for a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict. The national leaders of the two unions will also canvas support within the trade union movement for protests against the Israeli invasion and the escalation of the conflict." — Media release

While the above statement is useful and heading in the right direction for unions to continue involvement in international issues, Australian unions have a fine tradition of extending practical solidarity to working-class and national liberation movements going back many years. Australian unions had a big impact on the movement for East Timorese liberation by placing bans on Indonesian businesses and embassies in recent memory. Workers' Liberty believes that practical assistance such as this could be extended to the Palestinians too. It is not in the best tradition of international solidarity to simply rely on the 'good offices' of the Howard Government or indeed even the United Nations. These have proven in the past to be at best unreliable allies.

(Continued from back page)

Sharon wants to destroy the Palestinian Authority. In the wake of September 11 and the US "war on terror", Sharon has had more free rein to put this policy into action. The US administration has been slow to put pressure on Israel to desist. They, too, think that Islamism terror can be wiped out

Workers' Liberty No. 23 April - May 2002

by sheer military force. On the other hand, they want the Arab states to acquiesce in their planned attack on Iraq.

During the current action the Israeli army targetted not only the militias but also, again, the Palestinian police — the very same agency that the Israeli government had demanded

should act against the suicide bombers. Some of these police (there are around 40,000) had joined the Palestinian militias as individuals, but as a force they had not taken part in actions against Israel. Politically the Palestinian Authority is not Islamist, but Palestinian nationalist.

Sharon has all along wanted to make a negotiated peace with a real independent Palestinian state in the current occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza impossible. His strategy has been something like: fence the Palestinians in; set up a series of "bantustans", divided by Jewish fortified settlements and roads; allow very limited autonomy under Israeli sovereignty.

The strategy requires the intimidation and subjugation of the whole Palestinian population, not just the suicide bombers, and not just Arafat's Fatah organisation. Over the last two weeks we have seen this side of Sharon's strategy played out.

A recent poll shows 86% of Israelis supporting the military operations in the West Bank. However, the BBC poll is not conclusive. The same sample of Israelis were split down the middle when asked if they agreed with the statement: "There is no military solution to the conflict". There is an opposition inside Israel which wants to see a political settlement and has become more vocal since the start of the year. If information about the brutality of what has happened on the West Bank gets through, that opposition can grow.

Socialists must support the Palestinians' resistance to Israeli re-occupation of their territory. We demand that Israel completely withdraws from the territories it occupied in 1967. We want to see a fully independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. We oppose all attempts by the Israeli government to deny Palestinian self-determination — it is a right, not a concession. We make solidarity with those Palestinians and Israelis who demand a "two states" peace settlement.

(cont'd over)

Our solidarity with the Palestinians is unconditional, but socialists have to do more than take sides or make emotional appeals. In this conflict there are complex issues which need to be worked through, because those issues create terrible obstacles along the road to workers' unity in the Middle East and thus to socialism.

Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories should create a better framework for peace. It should make a just political settlement more likely. But the sad fact is that the forces who could demand such a settlement are not strong. Opposition to Sharon's policy from inside Israel is still weak, though beginning to revive — 7,000 demonstrated in Tel Aviv recently. The labour movements in the Arab countries are often non-existent, or suppressed.

It is not possible to repeat here the sorry history of the past few years since the Palestinians were first granted limited autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza. A permanent settlement did at one point seem a real possibility, even during the current intifada. However, since the election of Sharon's Government and the escalation of the suicide bombings, the prospect of a political settlement and peace has receded far into the distance. That outcome was far from being inevitable — in particular, there have been at points in the history when there has been a strong movement inside Israel for peace, able to put pressure on the Israeli ruling class.

Israeli ruling class policy — and even more so the opinion of ordinary Israelis — has always been shaped in part by the fact that the existence of Israel has been under threat, or

sustainable only at the cost of repeated war, or risk of war, with the far more populous Arab states which surround it. Right now war with the Arab states is not likely, though there has been fighting on Israel's Lebanese borders with the Hizbollah Islamist militia. But if the USA attacks Iraq it is probable Iraq will attack Israel.

The unanimous decision of the recent Arab summit, prior to the West Bank invasion, to offer Israel recognition and normalisation in return for withdrawal from Palestinian territory, was a big step forward. That is still combined with demands of a "right of return" for Palestinians. The exact formulation is softer than previous Arab governmental statements, but still attempts to accommodate those states, like Lebanon, who want to see a full-scale "return" of Palestinian refugees to Israel-Palestine — in Lebanon's case because they want to get rid of the Palestinians inside their own borders. But the mass collective "return" of all 3.7 million registered Palestinian refugees is incompatible with the continuance of the Israeli Jewish state.

Since 1988 the PLO has explicitly recognised Israel's right to exist. But many Palestinian factions do not. The people who have set the pace in the suicide bombing do not.

The terrible cycle of violence is poisoning Israeli society and pushing an increasing section of it towards the right. The dilemma facing those Israelis who do want a just settlement and would, if they felt they had a choice, choose two states is acute. They think, understandably, that simple withdrawal from Palestinian majority territory without a political settlement would not necessarily put an end to the Islamists' suicide bombings. In fact, without withdrawal there can be no political settlement, but without a clear independent peace message from Arab workers it is unsurprising that many Israeli workers relapse into nationalist narrow-mindedness.

However, there is an independent peace message from the Israeli left, and it can get louder. More Israelis will be encouraged by the brave peace campaigners who have marched in Tel Aviv against Sharon's war and will start to believe that a military offensive is not an answer, that Sharon must withdraw, and that there has to be a political settlement.

The only solution remains the one indicated by consistent democracy — two states for two peoples, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab. Many on the left in Britain reject "two states" — although it is PLO policy — in favour of a demand for the destruction of Israel. In this, the left does not help the Palestinians.

That same left often sympathises with the suicide bombers. They say the bombings of Israeli civilians are "understandable" or by implication justifiable. We can of course sympathise with the Palestinian youth who are driven to desperation. But we do not sympathise with the actions of the suicide bombers who resist any dialogue between the peoples. Wanton killing of civilians is a dead-end method; to destroy Israel, to provoke wider war, or to invoke Allah to punish the infidels, are dead-end aims.

The left supports the Islamists not only because of an unprocessed emotional attachment to the oppressed (something we all should feel) or because socialists rightly think Israel must get out of the occupied territories. The left also thinks that Israel should cease to exist as a state of the distinct Israeli-Jewish nation however much it might improve its treatment of the Palestinians or its own Arab minority. The idea is encapsulated in the left's demand for a single "democratic-secular" state in Israel-Palestine.

If Israel were to give up its nationhood it could only happen through the conquest and destruction of Israel by a huge military force — bigger than any yet put up by the armies of the Arab states which have gone to war with Israel since 1948. Socialists and democrats cannot want that to happen. The result would certainly not be democratic.

It will weaken the left because the left that denies Israel's right to exist proves itself to be neither democratic nor socialist on this issue. Rather, it proves itself vicariously Arab-chauvinist at best, anti-Semitic at worst.

To sum up. We side with the oppressed at a given moment. However we are not only concerned with the democratic rights of the oppressed: we are for the democratic rights of all peoples. If we are to aspire to unite the workers of oppressor and oppressed nations, we must do it on the basis of the policy worked out by the Marxist movement. The workers of the oppressor nation oppose oppression and side with the oppressed. There is no question of making

freedom from chauvinism — from, for instance, affiliation with the Islamists — a condition of the right of the oppressed peoples to fight for liberation. However, where workers of an oppressor nation have a realistic fear of future oppression, then we, the socialists, advocate that workers in the oppressed nation oppose their own chauvinists, and ally with the workers of the oppressor nation on the basis of a common democratic programme that recognises the legitimate rights of both peoples.

Right now a central concern is solidarity with the Palestinian resistance to any Israel military offensive. We demand that Israel gets out of the territory it occupied in 1967. We make solidarity with the peace movement inside Israel — with, for instance the 400 soldiers who are refusing to serve in the occupied territories. But at the same time we must advocate a solution based on consistent democracy — two states for two peoples. We must spell out the issues in their full complexity, because that alone can lay the basis for peace, justice and working-class unity in the region.

READ ON

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

"Our neo-barbarism is characterised by the enormous and awesome but increasingly ruinous power over nature of a humankind that has not yet mastered its own social processes. We are still at the mercy of irrational social and political forces, even while our power to tame the irrational forces of nature, at whose mercy humankind has been throughout its existence, reaches an amazing and still increasing capacity."

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, The Haitian revolution and Atlantic slavery

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.**

Latest pamphlets:

- **"Two Nations, Two States: Socialists and Israel/Palestine" \$5.00**
- **"How to Beat the Racists" \$5.00**

Other pamphlets:

"Why you should be a socialist" - \$3.50

"Is this as good as it gets? Australian workers, capitalism and the future" \$4.00

"The case for socialist feminism \$3.50

"How solidarity can change the world" - \$5.00

"Our demands are very moderate - We only want the Earth: Global capitalism and the environmental crisis" \$4.00

Also: "The Fate of the Russian Revolution", Vol. 1 ed. Sean Matgamna 608 pages \$35.00 (New shipment just in order now!)

Send cheques to "Workers' Liberty"

P.O. Box 313, Leichhardt 2040, NSW, Australia

Workers' Liberty

Two nations, two states!

Israel out of the occupied territories!

On Saturday 30 March the Israeli government began a new invasion of the West Bank's cities. Its first act was to send more troops into Ramallah. The army began to bulldoze their way into the compound of the PLO headquarters where Yasser Arafat had been under house arrest. Other West Bank towns were put under siege.

Although the media has been barred from certain areas, the whole world knows about the terrible battering the Palestinians have faced. We know about the destruction of ambulances, houses and shops. Many parts of the West Bank's shaky governmental infrastructure, which had already been battered in previous months of Israeli military actions, came under attack once more. Maybe one and a half million people were put under curfew, terrified of venturing out. Homes were without water and electricity. Ambulances and health workers could not get to the injured and dying. People were beaten up by soldiers. House to house and office to office searches were conducted. An estimated 4-5,000 people have been arrested and detained.

The Israeli Defence Force met greater-than-expected resistance from the Palestinian militias at the Jenin refugee camp — a one kilometre square patch of land which is home to over 15,000 people. As we go to press it seems some hundreds of Palestinians have been killed. And perhaps 50 Israeli soldiers — most of them reservists — have died. There has been another suicide bombing in Haifa.

By Thursday 4 April, the US had signalled to the Israeli government that it wanted the military offensive to stop and Colin Powell was dispatched to deliver that message personally. As we go to press the Israeli government is continuing its offensive. Many Palestinian militia-fighters have surrendered.

In the days ahead socialists must continue to support the battered Palestinian resistance to what may be a long-term re-occupation of their territory. We say: Israel get out of the Palestinian territories now! The Palestinians have the right to self-determination, to their own state. We must also recognise Israel's right to exist. A political settlement based on these realities is the only way to guarantee peace.



The Israel government said it was acting in self-defence, to put down the organisers of the suicide bombing campaign against Israeli civilians. The invasion did follow weeks of almost daily suicide bombs including an atrocious attack which killed 22 people in Netanya. Certainly, behind the invasion, and the high Israeli support for it, lies the terrible fear now felt by Israeli people. They feel defenceless against the suicide bomb attacks. The Israelis have every right to defend themselves against this kind of attack. However, Sharon's idea of "defence" is completely indefensible. And — because it will breed more suicide bombers — it will not even bring security to Israel.

The latest military offensive follows months of conflict in which the Israeli government has implemented a series of military and repressive measures in the Palestinian territories — previous invasions; tightening the closures of towns; setting up military checkpoints; conducting extra-judicial assassinations of Islamist "militants". Result? More suicide bombings.

At the beginning of March, around 200 Palestinians were killed in an operation against the refugee camps. At the end of March, almost 100 Israelis — both Jewish and Arab — had died in suicide bombings.

The Israeli military campaign will further poison the political terrain in Palestine. It will lead to the growth of reactionary Islamist groups such as Hamas. That is, of political forces who see the indiscriminate killing of Israeli civilians not just as a means to force Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory, but as part of a war to destroy the state of Israel.

(Continued on pages 21-23)