

# Workers' Liberty



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

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

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

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When Labor wins.....

# The struggle w'ont be over

By Riki Lane

It brings a smile to the face of any union, left or community activist to see Howard in such desperate straits. The crushing ALP wins in the WA and Qld state elections, in Ryan and the impending defection of Bob Katter from the Nationals to a new party all point that way. Liberal and National politicians are running scared. They have just about given up any hope of retaining government at the next federal elections, and are looking at how to keep their own seats instead. The GST has been a disaster for the conservatives and now the economy is going down the gurgler.

This opens opportunities and dangers for workers and the left. Labor will be coming to office on a rejection of the conservatives. Part of that is hostility to their economic rationalist, pro global capital agenda. Some of that has been reflected in support for One Nation. Getting the Liberals and Nationals out of office is important because it can make workers more confident in their ability to affect politics; because the ALP retains its links to the unions. However, *although Beazley may talk a bit more to the left*, he has essentially the same political and economic framework as the conservatives.

There has not been the sort of working class upsurge that could force an ALP government to implement radical policies, but there have been some important movements by unions recently. Eg the building industry 36 hour campaign, and recent victory on long service leave in Victoria, the determination of BHP workers in the Pilbara to resist individual contracts. The prospect of a Labor victory later this year could mean that a lot of union leaders see this as a helpful reason to avoid mobilising workers- just wait for Labor, and it will all be OK. In contradiction to this, the hope for and reality of a Labor victory could raise workers expectations and stimulate a willingness to tackle bosses and the government.

Beazley's government will avoid giving any more than it really has to give, any more than workers show they will seriously fight for. The left should be arguing for unions and other campaigning bodies to demand that Beazley and the ALP commit clearly to some basic points:

1. Scrap the GST, "rollback" is a farce - for a progressive tax system.
2. Repeal the Workplace Relations Act, and sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act. - for the right of workers to organise and strike.
3. Scrap work for the dole.
4. Free education for all - fund state schools, and universities.
5. Cut greenhouse gas emissions by expanding public transport and developing renewable energy.
6. An apology to indigenous Australians PLUS native title rights, and resources and support for self-determination.
7. Close the detention centres, welcome the refugees.

Other activities by the left can help to create a more confident atmosphere for struggle, if they are linked to supporting concrete demands to meet the daily needs of working class people.

What is needed is a push, now, by unions to show that they are serious about defending workers. And we need the left to mobilise together around a broad agenda including:

- Building M1 actions;
- Focussing union and activist campaigns on global corporations - making concrete demands on them;
- Posing a socialist electoral choice - such as the Socialist Alliance - that can point the way towards what a government that genuinely defends workers interests would look like;
- Challenging the ALP to really come through for their supporters on union laws, public health, education, housing, transport, democratic rights, etc. instead of doing the bosses bidding.

## **Working class solidarity**

If the unions, left and community organisations can work together on a program of action against capitalist globalisation and for working class solidarity, we can not only pressure Beazley and a future Labor government to respond to workers' needs, but build a movement that can really challenge the hold of global capital on politics and ideas.

This election is a chance for the left to try to break the logjam which means that Australia see-saws between an openly anti-working class Coalition government, and an openly pro-capitalist Labor government, with union acquiescence to both.

It is possible that the combination of raised expectations of the ALP, the Socialist Alliance election campaign and the street protests of the anti-capitalists could stimulate a militant rank and file in the unions. This possibility would be made much more likely if both the Socialist Alliance and the anti-capitalist protestors take their ideas and their demands into the unions, - and where possible the ALP.

It is out of this that more intense and serious union struggles could emerge. Under a Labor Government, this would both depend on and in turn strengthen a left within the labour movement able to put a persuasive case for working-class self-reliance, for union struggles and for not holding back out of fear of the Coalition Government stick, or false hope in the Labor Government carrot.

To do this means to renovate the whole labour movement: to reorient it with a perspective of working class struggle and a socialist vision that is about workers taking control from the bottom up.

## The other "left unity" project

By Janet Burstall

"Now We the People..." is planning a national conference on July 14-15 in Sydney. It has an array of signatories which include MPs from the ALP left, the Democrats and the Greens, from academics, unions officials, community and movement activists. The originator of "Now We the People..." is the SEARCH Foundation, which loosely continues the ideas and manages the resources of the wound-up CPA, without being a political party. NWTP was preceded by "The Millenium Political Discussion Project", begun by SEARCH in 1998 and which included in its goals: to "identify and take steps to resolve some of the deep conflicts on the left side of politics".

There are ex-CPA members who still consider themselves Marxist, seeing class relations as the basis of the political economy, whose political work is within the labour movement, and who advocate class struggle and socialism. But if they still hope that a movement for socialism can be shaped from amongst the efforts of the former CPA, the NWTP project is not promising.

The NWTP statement declares a common vision for a society of peace, harmony, cooperation, respect for diversity, equality and environmental sustainability. In this society, "the economy would serve the needs of the people. Citizens have the right to paid work and government should ensure this occurs in a socially and ecologically responsible way". It concludes with a call to "transform the national agenda and create a practical program as an alternative to the path of economic rationalism, racism and ecological destruction".

The "practicality" of its yet-to-be-developed program, lies in the implicit fundamentals of its approach, which are to develop a program for a left-influenced Labor Government, with some Democrats and Greens in the Senate pushing the programme further left along the left/right spectrum. It is hard to read the NWTP statement other than as an implicit acceptance that capitalism will continue, and a hope that the envisaged new world can somehow be regulated by a sympathetic government. What seems most "practical" about the statement is the number of signatories to it, and their positions of influence. The search for "practical" solutions that can keep the varied signatories together will confront socialists — hoping for results from the NTWP — with a dilemma. Once they start discussing concrete or practical issues and demands, the pressure will be on from the wing of the ex-CPA which doubts Marxism, to scale down and compromise for demands which can be regulated or granted by a government which has no intention whatsoever of taking the side of workers in industrial struggles. There will be no pretence that the practical program is primarily one to guide working class action and trade union organisation, around a broad political program. It will be an alliance, which by its nature of avoiding challenging capital, will constrict class struggle.

It is also difficult to see how supporters of the former CPA can be practical and constructive in developing a programme for working class action without accounting for the results of the policies followed by the CPA before its dissolution. The Accord is a particular instance. The CPA not only submitted to, but *promoted* the subordination of the union movement to an undemocratically-imposed agreement between the ACTU

leaders and the parliamentary ALP, an agreement which committed the ACTU to policing unions which campaigned for wages or conditions outside of the Accord. This was the opposite of promoting independent working class self-organisation. The CPA claimed there were positive prospects for the Accord, which would increase the social wage and involve the unions in not just "mere economist" wage campaigns, but in the very running of industry through consultative and tripartite mechanisms of decision-making. The Marxist ex-CPers will be poorly equipped to recognise the danger of repeating similar mistakes, if they do not identify the fundamentally class-collaborationist basis of the Accord.

The NWTP statement calls for the forging of "a constructive vision for Australia, one which focuses on celebrating ideas of the common good, not sectional, market-based solutions."

Celebrations of the "common good" are not going to relieve capital of its power to decide what it will hire labour to dig up or grow, to manufacture and to sell. Celebrations will not forge the ideas, the class-consciousness and the solidarity with class struggles that can inspire and lay the foundations for the working class to relieve capital of its power. The paragraph on trade unions does not in any sense pose the working class as an agent for challenging the prerogatives of capital. NWTP is coy about identifying capitalism as the basis of the social ills it lists. It refers variously to the problem as being "economic rationalism" and "globalisation".

It wants to "shape our destiny not in ways that fuel division and conflict". Whilst a peaceful road to socialism would be pleasant, we should "see the violence inherent in the system" (Monty Python). Whilst we sheet home the blame for violence to the ruling class (as was done successfully in the MUA dispute) this phrase in NWTP implies that we should not incite class struggle, which whenever serious carries a risk of conflict and violence.

NWTP thinks that "public life and politics should express the community's valuing of democracy and debate", but it refers only to civil society and parliament, not production and distribution. NWTP identifies cynicism that parliamentary democracy is authentic democracy. An authentic alternative to the limitations of parliamentary democracy needs to go way beyond constitutional reforms, to the very nature of power in capitalist society. Since globalisation has come under mounting challenge, and anti-capitalism has been revived in Australia by the S11 protests in Melbourne, the context is better than at any time since the early 1970s for advocating worker-community control of industry. This is the only basis for a democratic challenge to the power of capital, and the creation of a new society that is "an alternative to the path of economic rationalism, racism and ecological destruction".

### **A voice for a workers' alternative**

"A Voice for a Workers' Alternative" by Workers' Liberty (see WL 14 - ed) illustrates an alternative. It was partly incorporated into the draft platform for the Socialist Alliance for the 2001 Federal Election. However, as a consistent

document, the original proposal is a clearer on these points. It is not a complete document or programme, but it represents a class-based approach to politics. The preamble is more important than the (preliminary) list of demands.

The climate for discussing ideas on the left has opened up again, as it seemed to in the mid-1980s with discussions for new or broad left parties. Once again there is one section which is clearly anti-capitalist, critical of the ALP and which looks to class struggle, grouped in the Socialist Alliance, and there is the other section which inherits the CPA tradition, the Now We The People project. Perhaps the context has changed enough that there will be some genuine discussion, development and cohesion around new ideas arising out of this new round of left alliances. The NWTP project has three discussions running on its website, each with guidelines, a document and set of questions to promote real (not only virtual) discussions amongst supportive groups. The

discussion documents themselves are in need of a Marxist critique, but the way in which they are presented is a possible model for the Socialist Alliance to use to promote political discussion. I hope that the NWTP's "valuing of democracy and debate" will translate into a willingness to engage in discussion with Socialist Alliance supporters on the issues raised here, and also into a reversal of the ban on the "Trotskyist left" by the Global Justice Coalition in Sydney, in which many NWTP supporters play a key role. The Socialist Alliance also contains differences, and will need to debate many issues in order to help reforge a socialist working class movement in Australia. This is no claim for exemption.

Let comradesly discussion flourish!

( <http://www.nowwethepeople.org>

<http://www.search.org.au>

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## Works Councils vs. global corporate power?

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By Janet Burstall

**W**orks Councils are a form of worker participation in the management of businesses. The most recent Australian experience of something similar on a wide scale was that of Consultative Councils or Committees under the Accord in the 1980s. The only current Works Councils that I could find are in Europe.

The European Union Directive on Works Councils (1994) requires companies which employ more than 1000 workers across all member states and at least 150 workers in each of at least 2 member states, to set up Works Councils.

The stated aim of the Directive is to improve workers' information and consultation rights in multinational groups or companies in Europe.

They have been implemented in most EU countries.

What's in it for the workers?

- \* EWC delegates get access to information on crucial transnational issues, such as investment and reorganisation.

- \* EWC delegates gain contacts amongst workers in other countries, in the same company.

What's in it for the companies?

- \* EWCs make it easier for management to communicate with the workforce company-wide.

- \* EWCs improve mutual understanding between management and "employee representatives".

- \* EWCs "promote social cohesion or corporate identity in different parts of the company".

What have EWCs achieved on important issues?

- \* "Pioneering pre-directive agreements of the 1980s in French MNCs such as BSN-Danone ... helped demonstrate that EWCs are not harmful to the competitiveness of MNCs."

- \* Company restructuring and relocating processes have sometimes been modified to enable workers to find continuing employment, e.g. Unilever in Denmark extended the closing date of a factory from a few weeks to a few months, to allow workers enough time to find new jobs, as a result of WC representations.

- \* Management has sometimes provided information too late, if at all, and EWCs have been unable to negotiate on specific decisions.

- \* Management has sometimes shifted decision making to a higher level than that at which the EWC operates, e.g. Philips, Azko Nobel and Corus, Dutch based multinationals did this in 1999, "rendering discussions between local management and employee representatives inconsequential" and provoking strikes.

- \* EWCs consider issues within the requirements of management and shareholders for profitability.

- EWCs tend to centralise company-level industrial relations, reducing the accountability of union representatives to the rank and file.



### Profits and Works Councils

Issues for socialists and unionists who understand that decisions based on profitability are generally not in the interests of workers, their communities or environmental sustainability:

- \* EWCs are a 'social-partnership'. They are a management sanctioned form of working class representation. Where WC union representatives take a firm stand on any issue, the choice for the workers is either to give in to preserve the WC or take industrial action which could undermine the WC.

- \* Even legislation which seeks industrial harmony and common interests between workers and management cannot make a determinedly confrontational company, such as Rio Tinto, become bipartisan. Whilst governments and courts are in favour of maintaining 'free enterprise', they will be the mildest enforcers against draconian companies, whether through industrial laws, or Works Councils.

- \* The right of access to information is obviously appealing — but access to all the relevant information, in time for it to be useful, is difficult to achieve and probably limited by commercial 'in confidence' provisions and laws.

- \* The scope of decision-making to which a management-sanctioned bipartisan Works Council would have access would be limited, just as it is for a school students' representative council in relation to decision-making in the school.

- \* Bipartisan consultative councils and committees in the 1980s under the Accord failed to produce any long-term

protection or gains for workers. Works Councils could easily be very similar.

\* Works Councils are still effectively reactive bodies, which have their agenda set by the plans of company management.

Worker participation in managing capitalist enterprises is essentially like any other union-management negotiation. There need not necessarily be a dispute in progress (if there was, any 'participation' is likely to break down). Management may provide more information about the company. But consultation is not decision-making. Power is still exercised in the boardroom.

### **Negotiation**

Usual conditions for negotiations with management should apply to Works Councils:

\* Open meetings of workers should consider issues up for negotiation, and give delegates a position from which to negotiate.

\* Delegates should pass on all information to the workers concerned, rejecting confidentiality clauses or laws.

\* All significant issues should be referred back to members, and no agreement with management should be made without endorsement by open meetings, after thorough discussion.

- All union representatives should caucus before meeting management.

### **Works Council in the Australian context**

Government legislated Works Councils in Australia would not have the authority to include worker representatives from other countries where global corporations operate.

Unofficial Works Councils of union delegates — only with no management representation or legal regulation — would have to struggle harder to get the resources to meet, and to collect information about the company and industry. However they could maintain their independence from management and be much better placed to organise worker solidarity across borders.

European Works Councils information from European Industrial Relations Online at [www.eiro.eurofound.ie/](http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/).

### **Workers Control**

The power of the boardroom and the shareholders can only really be challenged and replaced by collective and democratic self-organisation on the part of workers. This implies public ownership and worker-community control of production, through committees of elected representatives on workers' wages, subject to instant recall. The workers of each factory, plant, workplace, company or industry, have the collective knowledge of their work and the needs of their communities and the environment to develop their own work plans, without reference to the demands of owners. Then we can reorganise production to produce for human need and sustainability, not for profit. The implications of this are to counterpose the collective will of the workers to the profits of capital, and to pose socialism against capitalism. Works Councils on the European models, and other forms of bipartisan worker participation cannot do this.

### **A public seminar and discussion for labour movement participants.**

Monday 9 April 1p.m. - 4p.m. Lower Storey Hall, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Convened by the ACTU, ASU and the Community Advocacy Unit.

Are Works Councils a realistic response to the attacks that we have seen upon workers' rights and upon their unions in this country? Can Works Councils operate in Australia's industrial, legal and cultural environment? What would the implications of the different models be for the Australian trade union movement?

Guest speakers: Monica Gould, Victorian Minister for IR, and Greg Combet, Secretary, ACTU, and others.

## **British Socialist Alliance meets**

By Martin Thomas

About 400 people gathered in Birmingham on 17 March to debate the election manifesto to be adopted by the Socialist Alliance, the new coalition of left-wing groups and unaffiliated activists which will fight over 80 seats at the general election. It was the first such broad gathering of the left, with wide-ranging political debate, for a very long time. And on one issue, anyway, the conference saw a long-worked-for victory for Marxist views. An amendment moved by Dion D'Silva from Wandsworth and Merton Socialist Alliance, stating that "we neither advocate the euro, nor defend the pound", was passed by a large majority. The case for this policy — neither euro nor pound, but workers' unity! — had been reinforced a few days earlier when William Hague announced "save the

pound" as the keynote of his election campaign. He claimed that entry into the euro would make Britain a "foreign land" — with, horror of horrors, "the Royal Mint melting down pound coins as the euro started to circulate" — and went on from that scaremongering about a "foreign land" to promise to lock up all asylum-seekers while their claims were considered. The forthrightness of the Alliance conference's response to Hague represented clear progress on the left. Previously — since the early 1970s — most of the left have taken a stance of "opposing" the European Union as such and championing "British withdrawal". Some left groups still support the call "no to the single currency" — the shamefaced relic of that old position. People who call themselves revolutionary socialists and Trotskyists have raised the slogans "No to Maastricht", or "No to the single currency", linking them with "Yes to the Socialist United States of Europe". But the road to the Socialist United States of Europe has to be by way of building European working class unity, class struggle, and fighting our own bourgeoisie in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg who raised the cry in 1914: "The main enemy is at home. The SWP — "no-to-Europe" and "Britain-out" agitators since 1971

— omitted all mention of Europe in the report on Hague's speech in their paper *Socialist Worker*, did not speak in the Birmingham debate, but voted for the "neither euro nor pound" amendment. There were two issues where, in my mind, shallow populism won out over thoughtful working-class politics at the conference. On Ireland, wording confined to the two phrases "British troops out" and "self-determination for the whole of Ireland" was endorsed as against amendments from Workers' Liberty, arguing for a democratic programme to unite workers from the two communities in Ireland, and from the Socialist Party, proposing a socialist Ireland but also referring to the need for the "consent of both communities". An amendment (from the CPGB) which would have had the Socialist Alliance counterpose "a voluntary democratic federal republic" to both the existing UK state and Scottish separatism was voted down in favour of arguments that the Alliance must stay in line with the Scottish Socialist Party's call for an "independent socialist Scotland".

A number of debates represented, to my mind, a false polarisation. Workers' Power and the CPGB pressed for full revolutionary statements (though, unfortunately, badly-worded ones!) on the question of the state. They claimed that this was a matter of "telling the truth" and winning radical anti-capitalist youth. The SWP counterposed the idea of a "minimum" programme tailored to what the SWP thinks will "fit the mood" of a largely phantom army of "left reformists" to be drawn into the Alliance. A third approach — and a better one, I think — would work from the principle of developing independent working-class politics and struggle from where we are now. The American Marxist James P. Cannon explained this well in the course of arguing, in the early 1920s, for the new (and then revolutionary) Communist Party of the USA to adopt a more realistic working-class orientation. We, he declared, are "a fighting party, and that... is the difference between us and other political organisations claiming the support of the workers. The difference between us and the [reformist] Socialist Party or the [populist] Farmer-Labour Party, or the [sell-out] Gompers [union] bureaucracy, will not be alone in the fact that we declare for the final revolution and they do not, not because we are willing to hold before the workers the final goal and all of these others are not, but because in terms of class struggle, on questions of bread and butter, on housing, on labour organisation, wages and hours, they are afraid to fight, and the Workers' Party says it will fight on every single one of these issues..I have talked to comrades who have fears of reformist tendencies. They are afraid we did not put enough revolutionary words in our programme, and I say, comrades, there is no danger of reformism in a party that is organised and led by class-conscious fighters...Communist principles and tactics, as taught by the great leaders, are made of the stuff of life: they live and thrive on contact with reality. They have no meaning except as they are put to constant use and to every test. Communist principles are living things. They have no significance standing alone. They are made to mix with the mass labour movement, and from that mixture fruitful issue comes.

The political test of the Alliance will not be by how bright-red its revolutionary badges are, nor by how slick it is at catching moods, but in the class struggle. The final part of the conference, where we debated "priority pledges" for election addresses, was also unsatisfactory. A preamble to those pledges -defining the Socialist Alliance as people whose aim in politics is to stand up for the working class — was adopted subject to redrafting, and that was an advance.

On the pledges themselves, after a very hurried debate, we ended up with a list proposed by the SWP — none of its elements particularly objectionable, but very much a breathless, unstructured "shopping list", with some flaccid wording (and one glaring omission, on trade union rights, which, we understand, will be remedied in redrafting). All said, however, the conference was a very welcome start of some real political dialogue on the left, and the results will be serviceable for the election campaign — so long as we mobilise the energy, the enthusiasm, and the commitment to make the ideas live in day-to-day working-class experience and struggle.

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## Conference report

# Fighting for the future

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By Leon Parissi

Over 150 activists attended Fighting for the Future, a conference on 24 March sponsored by anti-capitalist, M1 activists. This one day conference represented a coming together in debate and discussion of much of the Sydney activist left. Interestingly the main organisers seemed to come from the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO).

The main debates were had between the socialist camp of anti-capitalists who promoted a 'nix it' attitude to global corporatism and those with a 'fix it' approach to global capital. Many workshops on a variety of 'anti-capitalist' topics were held while outside of the meeting rooms lively debate and discussion was followed up by participants in a 'market place of ideas' as many left groups held bookstalls.

Some of the speakers, such as Dr. Patricia Ranald of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINet), represented positions which advocated more of a 'fix it' approach to the problems of corporate globalisation. Dr Ranald wants "alternative trade rules" to be implemented which would not disadvantage the poorer countries. Such regulation would inhibit the 'corporate global' push for free trade currently being enforced by the World Trade Organisation. Free trade with emphasis on minimal tariff protection for local industries gives huge advantages to the stronger economies. In brief she advocates the "further regulation and restraint of corporations and markets" and pitches the argument in opposition to the Pauline Hanson supporters who would do away with the WTO as well as international Human Rights protocols. She is probably correct on Hanson but ignores the possibility of the independent organisation of the working class acting in its own interests. Ranald calls only on unnamed forces (the ALP in government perhaps?) to act on behalf of the oppressed.

Some speakers from the floor supported Dr Ranald's viewpoint while going on to declare 'the socialist project' to be dead and promoted a set of politics which appeared to reflect an open accommodation to the capitalist system. These speakers tended to be sponsors of the 'Now We The People' grouping of ex-Communist Party of Australia members, ALP- Left MPs, church representatives, academics, artists and union leaders (see separate article *The other left unity project*).

On the 'nix it' side of the debate there seemed little clear idea of exactly who was to do the 'nixing' and how. Alison

Stewart of the ISO, speaking in summary, stated that who is to nix it is not the essential problem, we had to understand the nature of the system and promote more blockades which would stop the forces of capital from getting about their business as at Seattle and S11 in Melbourne. She was

pitching her contribution at the protest versus blockade debate within the anti-capitalist/anti-corporate movement. But again there was little emphasis on the working class acting in its own interests to achieve the objective of 'nixing' global capital

**Within contemporary environmentalist movements, it is increasingly uncontentious that capitalism is the root of the problem. The massive demonstration in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organisation, Melbourne (S11), Prague, etc were against capitalism. In Britain, Reclaim the Streets have organised impressive demonstrations which are against the capitalist system as such.**

**Needless to say we agree with this assessment. But if capitalism is the enemy, what force can most effectively fight it, and bring about meaningful, lasting change? Capitalism is a system in which everything — and increasingly it is literally "everything", down to the smallest detail of everyday life — is a commodity, something to be bought and sold. But it does something more than "commodify" our lives: it is a system based on large interconnected workplaces, whether in production or services, where the capitalists' profits are made by exploiting the working class. That this is so is easily tested: the most powerful weapon working-class people have, most of the time, is to go on strike. Without our labour, the ruling class can't make its profits.**

**The working class, the mass of people who work for a living, earning wages, who depend upon continuing to work to survive — rather than living off money made for them by other people's labour — is the force within capitalism for serious change. Organised into large workplaces, and therefore with a tendency to form collective bodies to defend their interests — like trade unions — the working class is not only the basic oppressed class of capitalism: its experience often compels it into the most radical action, into creating, participating in, and leading movements which take on a wide range of issues outside the workplace.**

**We think if the environmental movement is to be successful, and is to protect the future of the planet, it needs to look to the organised working class.**

## Neither left nor right but ahead?

By Nick Holden (writing from London)

I was active in the Green Party in the late 1980s. One of the slogans we used in the Greens was: "neither left nor right, but ahead".

Rudolf Bahro, the East German dissident who became a leading figure in the German Greens, expressed the idea similarly: "What is really radical is to think from the standpoint of the interests of humanity as a whole ...The world-historic mission of the proletariat was an illusion ...We must think of quite new combinations if we are looking to mass social force for a solution to the crisis."

This hostility to the left, and to the labour movement in general, was based on two related ideas: that the labour movement was not interested in the Green agenda, and that it was not a sufficient force for achieving that agenda, even if it could be convinced of it. To some extent this hostility is receding now, with organisations like Reclaim the Streets working with unions on the London Underground to agitate for the continued provision of low-cost, accessible public transport. But the idea that the Green movement must aspire to create something qualitatively better than the labour movement, rather than help socialists and others who wish to transform it into a better labour movement, lives on in many Greens.

The basic complaint of the Green movement was that trade unions were "only interested in jobs" and that therefore they couldn't be expected to relate positively to demands for reduced production and lower levels of consumption. But this oversimplifies both the nature and role of the labour movement and the solution to the environmental crisis. It is certainly true that trade unions are interested in defending jobs since they are made up of people in work who cannot afford to be out of work. This is hardly surprising. But unions

have often run campaigns to reduce the overall amount of work being done through demands for the shorter working week for example, provided that it is the profits of employers, rather than the workers themselves, who pay for it. The sticking point has never been the headline issue of reducing production, but the fact that the capitalist class wants to make certain that the costs are paid by the working class and not by itself. In some industries trade unions have been known to organise campaigns for a complete halt to the production of certain items on environmental grounds. During the 1970s, when the labour movement was still relatively buoyant and the question of peace, and disarmament figured large in political thinking, many shop stewards' committees at factories producing arms and related items produced cogent arguments for "conversion": substituting new products for the weapons they were then being asked to manufacture. Their objectives were simple: to maintain employment for themselves and their members, but not at the cost of producing weapons of mass destruction. When Vickers decided to close their ship building yard in Scotswood, Newcastle, in 1979, the 750 workers there undertook an investigation, which showed that there was a viable market for them to produce a range of recycling machinery (baling equipment and scrap sorters), but management would have none of it, and instead closed the works.

This experience was repeated frequently throughout the 1970s and early 1980s long before the Green movement proper had taken off in the UK — and the outcome was almost universal enthusiasm from the workers about conversion to non-military or non-nuclear technology, often to specifically environmentally-friendly production methods and outputs — but a refusal from management to investing its



capital in such "adventures". While the Green movement was happy to make propaganda about the fact that an understanding of environmental factors could actually create jobs (it is a general truth that production methods which are kinder on the environment tend to be more labour intensive than those which take no care of environmental concerns), rarely if ever did the movement seek to make common cause with the workers in the industries in question, preferring instead to paint the workers in each industry with the same brush as management. This, in itself, often served to drive workers back into defending "their" industry from criticism. To be sure, there have been low points in the trade unions view of the Green movement. The engineering unions spent much of the 1980s and early 1990s denouncing those who were doubtful about nuclear power as wanting to drive the entire population of Sellafield out of work! But there are some trends here: when the rank and file, especially through a network of shop stewards or workplace representatives, are dominant, then the unions are both more creative in their thinking and more effective in their action. When the unions are in retreat, and the national leaderships can set the tone, the demand for conversion is more likely to be replaced with one for defence of the status quo.

### **Only the working class will overthrow capital**

The Greens were making a mistake that others before them had made: assuming that the union leaderships were a true reflection of the interests and capabilities of the entire labour movement. In seeking to distance themselves from the union leaders, the Green movement in fact cut itself off from the one force in society capable of actually achieving the kind of transformation which most Greens want to see: the organised working class.

It is no accident of timing that the Green movement was on the rise precisely at a time when the organised labour movement was in decline. The "retreat from class" which sections of the left were making in response to a series of

defeats for the working class led to a belief that the working class had demonstrated its permanent incapacity to conquer capitalism. Some took this as meaning that capitalism could not be conquered, others that it was still possible but would take a force greater than that of "just one class".

The former group includes some of those now surrounding Blair; the latter mainly those who made the leap to Green politics in the late 1980s. While those who saw no prospect of capitalism's defeat set out to find a way of compromising with the system itself, the latter group sought a more principled compromise. They believed that the movement needed to be built across the classes if the environmental catastrophe was to be averted. But they deserted the working class without ever successfully establishing a bridge to the other side of the class divide. The Green movement as an alternative to the existing parties has stumbled, and in many places moved backwards from a high point about 10 years ago. In its place, the Green movement as an *alternative* to participation in party politics has grown up.

The lessons of the 1970s are simple, though. The ruling class is incapable, because of its drive for profit at any cost, of adapting itself adequately to the necessary demands of the Green movement. The working class is not only capable, it is also enthusiastic about taking up those demands and fighting for them when the opportunity arises. It has demonstrated already that the question of our impact on the environment can be incorporated into its programme.

Indeed, the working class is the only force in society with both the capability and the motive for transforming, and even saving, the world.

1. R Bahro, *Socialism and survival* 1982. Heretic Books, London

## **Greens for free enterprise**

**"People feel their fortunes are not being looked after by the politicians; they've been handed to the stock exchange and the World Trade Organisation,"**

**"Debate last century was about the centrally planned versus the market economy. This century it's going to be between the Parliament and the stock exchange.**

**"I was brought up in a very anti-Marxist household, I can tell you. I believe in free enterprise. But I think the job of parliament is to regulate it so everybody gets a fair go."**

**"I will be telling the conference [Greens at Easter] the Greens are the alternative to the de facto world government that capital has at the moment, that the multinational corporations have,"**

**"I'm very aware at the moment that I represent a political toehold of the greens in this country"**

**"But I'm an optimist".**

**Bob Brown was interviewed by Mike Secombe for the SMH 16 Mar 01.**



## Gunships and bulldozers against unarmed Palestinians

From Gush Shalom ([www.gush-shalom.org/](http://www.gush-shalom.org/))

**W**hile visibly to the world helicopter gunships are bombing Gaza, another wave of destruction goes on nearly unnoticed.

Palestinian homes are being systematically bulldozed all over the West Bank. In this case there isn't any pretence of "security interests" or "military targets". The houses destroyed yesterday and today belong to ordinary Palestinian citizens whose only crime is the wish to have a roof over their heads.

We just now hear of Rabbi Arik Asherman's being arrested while trying to resist the 4th demolition of the Shawamreh house. Salim Shawamreh and his family at Anata already had their home destroyed three times and always rebuilt with the help of Israeli peace activists. (Salim Shawamreh also went on a speaking tour with Jeff Halper in the U.S. to explain the question of the so-called "illegal Palestinian houses.") After a warning this morning, activists of ICAHD (committee Against House Demolitions) hurried to Anata. Among them was Rabbi Arik Asherman of Rabbis for Human Rights who got arrested while trying to block the way of an enormous bulldozer.

The military government's long-standing policy is to restrict Palestinian construction to small enclaves, and to deny building permits to Palestinians whose land happens to be located outside these overcrowded designated areas ("ghettos" you could call them).

Under Barak, the destruction of such "illegal" houses was stopped - after pressure from below and internationally. This restriction has now been removed, and the military authorities gleefully embarked on a major wave of destruction. Yesterday, four houses were destroyed at Issawiya, just outside Jerusalem. As already mentioned, this morning we heard of four houses destroyed at Anata, another Palestinian suburb of Jerusalem followed by another two demolitions at Issawiya. Just now we heard of four houses destroyed in the Hebron area, between the settlement of Kiryat Arba and its offshoot enclave of Giv'at Haharsina. (The settlers have wanted to "get rid" of these Arab houses, which prevent the creation of a settler "territorial continuity".) Cynically, all this took place at the same time that Foreign Minister Peres held a highly-publicized meeting with Palestinian officials at Athens, concerned with "ending violence" and "ameliorating the civilian population's situation"...

**Move motions of support for the Palestinians in your labour movement, student or community group, send them to:**

To Prime Minister Ariel Sharon  
<[webmaster@pmo.gov.il](mailto:webmaster@pmo.gov.il)>

To Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Minister of Defense,  
[sar@mod.gov.il](mailto:sar@mod.gov.il)

To Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister [sar@mofa.gov.il](mailto:sar@mofa.gov.il)

## Two nations, two states

By Colin Foster (From *Action for Solidarity*)

**O**n Saturday 17 March about 1000 people marched in London under the slogans: "Stop Israel's war crimes", "End the occupation", and "Support the

right to return". The main activist force behind the demonstration was the Socialist Workers Party, whose stated position is that "the road to liberated Palestine and the democratic, secular state the PLO used to invoke does not pass through Gaza or Jerusalem. It runs through Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad" (Anne Alexander, *International Socialism* no.89). In other words, they wish for an Arab conquest of Israel, though preferably by an Arab working-class movement and with toleration for Jews in the resulting state. The SWP has however been less vocal recently with slogans like "smash Israel", and the demonstration was also endorsed by several groups and individuals who think quite differently, such as Afif Safieh, the Palestine Liberation Organisation representative in Britain; Just Peace UK; and Tony Benn. The slogan "right to return" served as an umbrella because it means different things. Historically, to the Arab states who launched the slogan after 1948, it meant a promise to the Palestinian refugees whom they kept in second-class status that a new war would drive out the Jews and enable them all to reclaim a reunited Arab Palestine. In recent negotiations between Israel and the PLO, it meant a deal whereby Israel would admit an agreed number of refugees, or their descendants, each year. Emotionally, especially after the election of Ariel Sharon as prime minister of Israel, it is easier to let all the interpretations of "right to return" merge into one shout of support of the Palestinians. Politically, it is important to distinguish. Action for Solidarity prints the following leaflet, distributed by Workers' Liberty participants in the demonstration, as a contribution to the debate.

For a Palestinian state - for Israeli withdrawal

## Breaking chains

By Riki Revolutskaya

### Liberal show true colours

**V**ictorian Liberals have shown where they really stand on equality for queer people. They have decided to reject legislation to equalise the status of homosexual and heterosexual de facto relationships in many areas.

The Liberals talk about not wanting to undermine "the family". Pandering to anti-gay prejudice among conservative voters, they are echoing Howard's "family values" push — a return to the standards of the fifties.

The RMIT and Melbourne University Queer departments called a snap action on the steps of parliament on 20 March, when the bill was due to be debated. On the same day, the Fair Employment Bill was also to be knocked back by the Liberals. Fairwear and the TCFUA called an action for the same time. The Fair Employment Bill is designed to protect some 250,000 workers left without Award pay and conditions after Kennett's attacks, in particular some 144,000 outworkers in Victoria alone. It was a good way for us to show our support for both bills and stand in solidarity with workers not protected by fair legislation.

Several hundred turned out for the TCFUA rally and several dozen for the queer demonstration. Good contacts were made between the two groups.

In the event, neither Bill was debated as Attorney-General Hull was ill. The Bills are due to be debated again in the session starting 3 April. QUEER has called a rally to protest the Liberals' obstruction of much-needed reform for that day at 5p.m. on the Parliament House steps. QUEER will be working to get the broadest possible support for this rally, with both queer and labour movement groups.

#### Rally against Catholic Church homophobia.

George Pell, Melbourne's Catholic Archbishop, is notorious for homophobia, sexism and generally opposing any

progressive reforms, e.g. on drugs he has opposed heroin prescription trials and safe injecting centres. His constant attacks on the "gay lifestyle" directly contributes to the alarmingly high suicide rate amongst young gays, especially in rural areas.

QUEER has organised a rally on Easter Sunday at Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral.

Gather at 11a.m. Fitzroy Gardens, cnr Lansdowne and Albert Streets, 15 April.

### Obituary: Rob Dawber 1955-2001

## An unusual courage

By Sean Matgamna, Workers Liberty, London

People are courageous for all sorts of reasons but Rob's courage was very unusual. In any celebration of Rob's life, we look at the humorous, side: but we also need to look at the bitter reality. Rob is dead at a comparatively young age because of the way industry is run. This is something to be angry about.

Rob's life was governed by a decision he made in his teens to be a revolutionary socialist-a communist and he was a martyr to it. Rob went to work on the railways because he wanted to do a political job for an organisation which encouraged students to be part of the fight to reorganise the labour movement on socialist lines.

Many workers are exposed to asbestos or other health risks as part of a normal industrial experience. It is a working class heritage. Rob inherited this sort of work, as he came from a family of miners. Rob started out to get away from it - he went to college to "do better for himself". But he went back to it for political reasons.

Rob became aware very early in life that we live in a slave society where the majority of people are forced to work for those who own the means of production. Having become convinced of this Rob decided it was possible to have something better. It may be presumptuous of me to try and interpret Rob, and of course I cannot do this fully, but there were two things I think that motivated Rob; Firstly there was the society around him, where the people running industry found it too expensive to take precautions against death-dealing injuries for workers. Rob. knew this is a society of barbarism. Secondly Rob knew it was not necessary to have society the way it is. It was and is possible to reorganise the world on a better basis: more humane, more democratic, more rational. Rob took these two ideas and he spent his life trying to realise them.

But however rational one may think socialism is. it is a movement that was defeated again and again in the twentieth century. Without the labour movement you cannot make a socialist transformation of society. Yet the movement is bureaucratized and needs to be changed. It needs to be emancipated from bourgeois ideas. Socialists don't just enlist in a straight struggle against the open enemy of the working class - the bourgeoisie. Socialists also have to change the working class, so that it can change society. The socialist movement that Rob joined was in serious crisis - in moral decay and political confusion. It needed to be changed so that the labour movement could be changed, and in turn the labour movement could change society. Rob wasn't daunted by these difficulties. He set about trying to organise to change things. Rob died before any of the fundamental changes that he fought for happened. Was his activity therefore foolish - time spent misunderstanding the nature of life and reality? No.

We are living in a new seeding time for socialism This is a time when the labour movement is trying to throw off along period confusion. And Rob achieved a great deal because he helped sow the seeds of the future. In the many people that Rob met he sowed the seeds of a revived labour movement, Without understanding Rob's, contribution to this, one cannot understand Rob's life. Rob spent almost all his adult life believing that he was part of something that went beyond him- the labour movement. This was something that gives life meaning beyond its purely individual meaning. In some small way Rob's courage came from this.

It is easy to mock tiny groups of socialists who think they can change the world but in the end the rational basis for Rob's belief was rooted in capitalism itself and the facts about the way society is organised - that capitalism generates class struggle, that capitalism cannot survive without a working class. And eventually the working class *does* fight back. The working class is fighting back. The struggle goes on. Socialism is a reflection of the processes that go on in capitalist society. For that reason Rob's life was not just a personal thing. It was part of a movement that goes on and will revive, and has benefited from Rob's activity.

There's no consolation in that for Rob being dead at 45. It is a personal tragedy. Rob was not fond of bullshit and consoling cant. He would not want us to deny that reality, But there is continuity, and a great deal of Rob Dawber does continue.

## Letters

### The ALP and socialists

Until recently I also held the view that groups to the left of the ALP should preference the ALP in elections. Regrettably, this really doesn't make sense anymore. I am sending you the

text of a letter that I recently submitted to some newspapers which aims to change the tactic of voting altogether. My view is put the major parties LAST, both of them. If you feel slightly more inclined to support the ALP place them above the Coalition but not higher than that. The two-party system is *the* problem in the way of any meaningful reform. Nothing will change, certainly not in a socialist direction, until we have

Proportional Representation and that will only happen when the major parties are reduced to minor parties in the parliament or wiped out completely. Only voters can do that by understanding how they can use their precious right to vote them both OUT, not IN. Here is the text of the letter which probably, and for understandable reasons of continued corporate domination, is unlikely to be published. VOTERS UNITE AND REVOLT!

It is reported that the level of corporate financial support for the federal election is now higher for the ALP than that for the Liberal Party. This demonstrates that the ALP cannot claim to represent the working class or the unions anymore. It cannot even claim to represent the middle income earners who have suffered as much under the ALP as under the Coalition. The local and foreign corporate sector is firmly in control of the political direction of this country. Most Australians surely resent this situation deeply and want to change it but the electoral system favours the major parties. The minor parties and Independents, starved of both funds and publicity, are rarely a serious threat to the major parties. When they are legislation is passed, as in New South Wales in November 1999, to make it impossible to compete next time. The solution for voters is not difficult though. They can simply place their preferred "minor" parties and Independents first and both the major parties last on their ballot paper - an inherent democratic right still available. The time has come for a voter revolt to end de facto one-party corporate state. Let the campaign begin Australia! Vote the major parties down. Let's get some really interesting people in our national Parliament. The dreary charade of the two-party tyranny has lasted long enough.

Klaas Woldring,

*(The above letter is re-printed as the reply, below, was omitted by mistake from the last issue -ed)*

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Dear Klaas,

Thank you for taking the time to reply to the Workers Liberty statement about the Socialist Alliance.

We seem to have a fundamental disagreement as to what parliamentary politics is about. We don't believe that parliament is the central forum for achieving socialism, or that it can be used to shift things "in a socialist direction". The 2 party system is not the obstacle to socialism, in our view. Capital rules through a vast network of institutions and corporations. Parliament is but one institution, which plays an important role in maintaining if not active consent, at least passive submission to the status quo. But the force which can overthrow this system is the organised working class, waging struggle at the industrial, political and ideological levels. The problem is that the socialists, the marxists have been for decades leading the organised workers down the sterile paths of stalinism or social-democracy.

The point of standing parliamentary candidates is to attract support for workers who are engaging in struggle, and to develop solidarity and understanding of the means to achieve socialism. Working class self-reliance is key. And the reality is that the unions are the main means of struggle available to workers, and the ALP is based on the trade unions. Part of the political battle within the unions against leaders who blame politicians for their own lack of policies for workers, is to demand that those leaders and the unions call the ALP to account. Accountability within the working class movement would unleash a powerful force for radical change.

There can be no shift in a socialist direction (if you mean by that improved state provision for the needs of workers and

the poor) at the level of parliamentary politics, that does not contain within it the threat of backlash and reassertion of the demands of capital, it would be inherently unstable. The decisive "shift" will only occur if and when the self-organised workers assert their power over the power of capital, and relieve all the bourgeois institutions of their power, creating a new democracy of producers and consumers.

So, for Workers Liberty, the point is to support and encourage working class self-organisation, democracy, accountability, solidarity and class consciousness.

Whilst many people may blame the two party system, I think they are mistaken. Whilst some parliamentary reforms could make Australia more democratic, they are not the central issue. Class is, and it is the ALP's connection to working class politics that leads us to call for the election of a Labor Government, PLUS class struggle. The problem of the last Labor Government was that the union leaders deliberately stifled class struggle, and the socialist left who recognised this problem were too small and uninfluential to effectively challenge it. Perhaps a Socialist Alliance election campaign could help to change our chances next time there is a Labor Government.

Comradely,

Janet

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## Debate with the Greens

*When Leon Parissi of Workers Liberty posted our proposed platform for the Socialist Alliance, to the M1-2k01 email list, the following discussion ensued about the relationship between socialism, the working class, the Greens and the ALP. Chris Chaplin, Secretary of the Victorian Greens contributed in a personal capacity.*

I find it amazing that any alliance based primarily on revolutionary rather than reformist principles would pay credence to the Workers Liberty's proposal that Leon Parissi posted to this mail list. While we all want to see the end of conservative government, I am astounded to see Workers Liberty advocating that preferences be directed to the economic rationalist ALP ahead of the Greens.

The same ALP that used successive "wage accords" to ensure that increases in bosses' salary packages outstripped workers' wages by 400% under Hawke & Keating, & who refused to remove the secondary boycott provisions that stifle the power of workers to act in solidarity? The same Labor Party that joined the Coalition last year to pass legislation allowing the army to intervene in mass protests? The same ALP that will "roll back" the GST but refuses to abolish it? The ALP that introduced mandatory detention of refugees, and continues to call asylum-seekers "criminals"?

Where was the ALP at s11? I seem to recall that they were INSIDE the WEF forum (alongside the ACTU leadership), looking out at all the Greens MPs on the barricades. I also recall the ALP Premier declaring that protesters "got what they deserved" after the police assaulted 100's of peaceful protesters (including two Greens MPs). The Greens are left of the ALP, on just about every policy from anti- privatisation & abolishing corporate subsidies, to progressive taxes, free education, social justice and the environment. We're unlikely to win seats in the Lower House (given the voting system that favours the major parties in the House of Reps), but have a real chance of picking up some Senate seats at the expense of the Democrats and One Nation. If Worker's Liberty thinks it's

better to have those last 3-4 Senate seats go to the ALP than the Greens, then take a large step to the right, Leon.

Chris Chaplin, Secretary, Vic Greens  
(personal capacity) 1 March 2001

Chris (and list readers),

You recently posted a message about the Socialist Alliance, expressing amazement that Workers' Liberty advocates that the Socialist Alliance should preference the ALP.

Here is a reply:

The two paragraphs in the Workers' Liberty proposal for the Socialist Alliance that I think you found astounding are: "Call for a class-based vote, with preferences to the ALP or other workers' candidates, not to the Democrats. We are for the return of an ALP government, as long as the ALP remains the political expression of the trade unions, ie the overwhelming majority of the organised working class."

"2.3 SA will advocate a vote in parliamentary elections first for any endorsed SA candidates, as a general rule with second preferences to the ALP ahead of Greens and the Democrats. There may be some individual cases for allocating preferences to other left-socialist candidates before the ALP."

In reply to Chris's being astounded, I would say that first and foremost, we are not about finding the best way to reform capitalism, but rather to side with working class struggles and to support and strengthen both working class self-organisation and consciousness of the potential of the self-organised working class to replace capitalism with socialism.

Consequently we do not primarily judge the Democrats or the Greens or any other political groups on how "socially progressive" their policies are, in the sense of how much government regulation they want, how supportive they are of people of oppressed identities, or how good their environmental policies are. We judge them primarily on their attitude and relationship to working class struggle, and specifically to the organised labour movement, the unions AND the ALP. We don't consider the ALP just a political party like any other. It is not like the Democratic Party in the USA, which is distinctly NOT based on the trade unions, there is no means at all for unions in the USA to call the Democratic Party to account. US labor can only deal with the Democrats as a regime, as it can deal with a Republican regime. The ALP is both a political party and part of the labour movement, and when Australian workers struggle, it is invariably through their unions, their movement, and we are for workers using the union connection to fight to impose working class policies onto the ALP. For a start we have argued recently for unions to demand commitments from the ALP to repeal the GST, and to repeal all of Reith's anti-union laws.

Your criticisms of ALP policy and actions are completely valid. Workers' Liberty supporters were part of a group called Socialist Fight in the 1980s, and we were very active opponents of the Accord, and supporters of the unions which copped flak from the Labor Government AND the ACTU, including and especially from the CPA dominated unions. We supported the Norm Gallagher led BLF against deregistration by Labor despite Gallagher's despicable actions only a decade earlier in doing the developers' dirty work by smashing the militant NSW BLs, whose green bans were an expression of workers' control.

It is vital to distinguish between the huge importance of workers' self-organisation in unions, ie the rank and file membership of those unions, and the politics of the union

leaders which we oppose. The labour movement is a primary site in which to fight for socialist politics, and we do not treat parliamentary politics and labour movement politics as disconnected, which in practice means we treat union politics and ALP politics as interconnected. In fact, when workers integrate industrial and political struggles more closely, we will have a far more radical labour movement.

So how do the Greens line up in this context? I have to agree that at S11, on S12, Bob Brown was one of the best speakers, in terms of recognising the role of the state in attacking blockaders, and the gap in power and privilege of those inside the Crown Casino, compared to those of us on the streets. And, Workers' Liberty doesn't rule out preferring Green candidates over Labor candidates, depending on where Green candidates line up on class struggle. Interestingly Chris, you say:

"The Greens are left of the ALP, on just about every policy from anti- privatisation & abolishing corporate subsidies, to progressive taxes, free education, social justice and the environment." without mentioning trade union rights or class struggle at all. It's true that these points COULD be assumed to be included in others here, but for Workers' Liberty at least, class is not just one form of oppression of equal political significance (which is not say that personal trauma arising from all sorts of oppression cannot feel just as bad or even worse than experiencing working class cultural oppression) to racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on.

If there are Green candidates who take a strong stand on class, and especially who say that they are socialist, then we would look very favourably on preferring them ahead of Labor. Just as the paragraphs in our statement have astounded you, your summary of what makes the Greens progressive, I find to be astonishingly reformist, without the benefit of any class content at all. In fact it doesn't seem that many elections ago that the Democrats looked so much "to the left" of the ALP, on social issues. But they have no working class base or analysis to keep them there, and so we've seen them allow Howard to deliver the GST, (not to deny the ALP helped too), to allow some parts of the WRA through (and it's too true that the ACTU has pursued a strategy of relying on the Democrats to hold Reith back).

Perhaps you can elaborate and we will find that the Greens have more to offer than we had realised. A bottom line for Workers' Liberty would be a strong commitment to repeal of the Workplace Relations Act, and Sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act, underpinned by support for workers' rights to organise unfettered by the law.

Thank you for letting us know what you think of our ideas, and hopefully this discussion will continue.

Janet Burstall  
2 March 2001

Thanks Janet for your considered and articulate response. I agree that further discussion on where the Greens stand in relation to the class struggle is essential, not only for the Alliance in working out whether the Greens are friend or foe, but for the Greens ourselves as a critical issue of what sort of party we aspire to be.

However, I'm conscious that the [m1-2k01] mail list is primarily focussed on the global mayday mass mobilisation against corporate tyranny, rather than being a discussion list on Australian political alliances. I'd be happy to continue this discussion off-list with you, Leon & any others who feel it would be useful.

In relation to m1 itself, there is one thing I can announce. At the State Council of the Victorian Greens Party last Sunday, the following motion was passed:

"That the Australian Greens (Victoria) endorses the use of peaceful mass protest and civil disobedience as a legitimate means of democratic expression; that we echo [Greens Federal leader] Senator Bob Brown's statement on m1; and that we announce the formation of a Victorian Greens affinity group for m1." For those who missed the earlier posting, here is Bob Brown's statement: "M1 is a way of expressing the need for us to close the gap between rich and poor, end exploitation in the workplace, and defend the environment. It is a positive call for democracy: in a world where corporate power has defrauded democracy and its central idea of one person, one vote, one value. Bob Brown 24/2/01"

Chris Chaplin  
Secretary, Victorian Greens  
3 March 2001

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I am glad that Chris Chaplin of the Greens "applauds the announcement of Australia's Socialist Alliance based primarily on revolutionary rather than reformist principles". Workers' Liberty is not merely interested in "seeing the end of conservative government". We are for the creation of a workers' government. Such a government will act against the capitalist class in the first instance and, based on principles of working class democracy, act in the interests of workers and their communities with the same force as the Howard government acts in the interests of the capitalist class. But that is the longer term view. Where are we now and how to proceed. The vast majority of the working class in this country are loyal to their official representative organisations

- the unions and the ALP (which the unions created). The movement which created the ALP was not just interested in creating a pathway to Parliamentary job security. They wanted a political voice and action in their interests. It is the spirit of that movement which needs to be regenerated today. So do we merely advocate a vote for Labor to "expose" the rotten leadership and its pro-capitalist credentials - to lift the veil from workers eyes? No. Not merely that. A movement FOR a workers government both inside and outside the unions, both inside and outside the ALP can be the basis for creating a just society. Call on the unions (from within) to account for not challenging the sometimes anti-workers actions of Labor in government. Challenge union leaderships (from within) to call on Labor to act militantly in the interests of workers (which is why many workers vote ALP). This may sound hard. It is. But without workers in their thousands making demands on their labour movement what chance is there for building an alternative society based on the self emancipation of the working class. That is, a society based on socialism. Not the actually existing "socialism" of a China, Cuba or that of the Soviet Union of a decade ago. The Greens (or some of them) may be 'to the left' of the ALP at the moment. So have been the Democrats at times. But what is the relationship to the working class which is the only force today with the latent capability of replacing capitalism with a real working class democracy. It is fundamentally sectarian to only set up as an alternative to the labour movement and not to realistically relate to that working class reality.

Leon Parissi

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## Book review

# Fighting Back: The Politics of the Unemployed in Victoria in the Great Depression

By Charlie Fox, Melbourne University Press, 2000

Reviewed by Leon Parissi

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Charlie Fox has written a valuable book on the politics of the unemployed. Though the title suggests it to be only of historical interest the author also covers today's concerns such as 'mutual obligation' and 'work for the dole' showing that they are not recent inventions.

Fox begins with an overview of the situation facing today's unemployed and from there delves with some detail into the people, organisations and politics of the unemployed during the Great Depression. Throughout the book, Fox steers clear of a dry academic approach (he is an academic and the book began life as a doctoral thesis).

Much interest lies in the descriptions of the political battles between reformists and radicals among the unemployed, with a constant struggle for leadership evident between the increasingly Stalinised Communist Party of Australia and the official (ALP/Trades Hall) wing of the labour movement. But the biggest message of the book is the presentation of the unemployed as active participants in the struggle for their right to be treated decently by a society which had cast them on the scrap heap. They didn't just let the Great Depression roll over them. They fought back with their fists and in their thousands by staging strikes and by

marching in the streets against evictions, against cuts to the 'susso', against work for the dole.

The conservative Victorian Government headed by Argyle came into power in 1932 and "empowered Town Clerks to demand that unemployed men in their municipalities work for the dole". Not all councils complied, but many did. The unemployed replied in the traditional working class way and went on strike. There were several dole worker strikes in the next few years, some very successful. These actions won concessions and the unemployed were not bowed by new regulations allowing instant dismissal and loss of susso for attending stop work meetings. In March 1935, the Trades Hall affiliated Central Unemployed Committee declared a State-wide strike which was observed by virtually all dole workers. Many thought this action helped bring down the Argyle Government. Unfortunately the new Government, supported by Labor, was headed by the Country Party. While lines of communication were more open, not many concessions were forthcoming from a cash-strapped and unwilling government. The unemployed movement, in its demand for work — and if not work then the dignity of reasonable susso — were not always

supported by the official trade union movement or by Labor in Government. Fox finishes his book on this note:

"Work for the dole represented punishment for being unemployed in the 1930s. In the turn of the century Australia, nothing much has changed."

## Organise for solidarity

Even anti-Stalinists often think that a revolutionary organisation must have a single "party line" and not allow its members to dissent or debate in public, or in the organisation's newspapers and magazines, or anywhere except in carefully marked off and privatized discussion periods. In fact, **that is a Stalinist idea.**

Yes, an effective socialist organisation is necessary. Strikes, union organisation, campaigns, even revolutionary upheavals, will happen without it. But the politics of those movements will depend on what ideas the workers find already to hand. History shows us huge and militant workers' movements rallying to racist, religious, nationalist, or even (in Eastern Europe and Russia in 1989-91) free-market liberal ideas when there was no socialist alternative embodied in sufficiently effective and credible organisation.

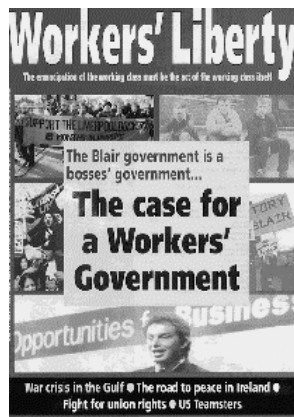
Both newly-involved workers and long-time activists can learn immense amounts very quickly in big struggles. The struggle itself points us towards solidarity. But the be improvised on the hoof. And lessons Socialist organisation is necessary as **the** which allows activists to learn from history has to be fought not just on the fronts of and theories.

There are many organisations many of them could best be **united in a** structure. But that cannot be done activist do, in the face of this often

The same as you would do faced with you have a stubborn sickness. Offered herbal medicine, or faith healing, you question of cures?" You would investigate, politics: **examine the programmes** of the against 'common sense' and basic Marxist corresponds to what they say in words.

We are for the unity of the revolutionary working class left in a single organisation, one that is tightly-knit enough to carry out agreed-upon activities promptly and unitedly, but also one that insists on full freedom for minorities to organise and debate, including in the public press.

Right now, **we organise ourselves** in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on those democratic lines. We have our own ideas to bring into all our activities, and we're out to recruit — we make no apology for that — but we intervene not as a sect trying to carry "the party line" by force of hectoring and bluster, but as thinking, critical-minded activists concerned to build the broad movement. **If you disagree, debate and discuss with us. If you agree, join us.**



political ideas needed to win socialism cannot all just will be un-learned unless we ensure otherwise. **memory of the working class** — as a structure and from each other's experiences. The class struggle economics and politics, but also on the terrain of ideas

proclaiming the goal of socialism. In our view **single organisation**, with an open, democratic overnight or at our behest. What, then, should the new confusing variety of groups?

a choice of schools, or of methods of healing when conventional treatment, acupuncture, osteopathy, would not say: "Why don't they all get together on the read, and check them out. The same goes with different organisations, carefully check what they say theory, and see whether what they do in practice

**Socialist Alliance Launch:  
Melbourne launch  
Tuesday April 10, 7pm  
Brunswick Town Hall, Sydney Rd, Brunswick  
Info: 03-9639 8622, 03-9386 4815, 03-9388 0062  
Speakers include Craig Johnston,  
AMWU Victorian State Secretary**

# Workers' Liberty

## Macedonia: NATO no friend of justice

By Colin Foster

**A**lbanians in Macedonia have the right to secede and unite with Kosova or Albania if they want to. At present the leaders of the armed uprising by sections of the Albanian population in Macedonia state their aims no higher than democratic rights, or federal status, within Macedonia — and if the conflict can be resolved by such reforms, all the better — but there is nothing sacred about the existing border.

The border was essentially drawn in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, when Serbia, driving back the power of a decaying Ottoman Empire, conquered both Kosova and what is now Macedonia. Other areas of Macedonian population were taken by Bulgaria and by Greece. After World War 2, Tito's new Yugoslavia deliberately conciliated Macedonia — recognising Macedonian identity where the monarchy of 1918-41 had defined the area simply as part of "southern Serbia" — but maintained a hard face against the Albanian majority population of Kosova.

Between 23% and 35% of Macedonia's two million people are Albanians. The lower figure is the official Macedonian one; the higher one, that given by Albanian sources. The remainder of the population is a mix, with a Macedonian majority but Turkish, Roma, Serb and Vlach minorities. The state, however, defines itself exclusively as Macedonian. Albanian is not recognised as an official language. There is no higher education in Albanian (though there are Albanian schools). It is harder for Albanians to get public-service jobs, and this is an important consideration in a very poor country, even poorer since the break-up of Yugoslavia, and with (on latest estimates) 35% unemployment.

A large part of Macedonia's Albanians live near the border with Kosova, and are the majority in the border area. If they seceded to join Kosova, or a united Albanian state, then that would leave problems for the Albanian minority in other parts of Macedonia — notably in the capital, Skopje — but no good can be done by Macedonia's Albanians being held down against their will by the armed force of the Macedonian state.

The flare-up in Macedonia may have been prompted by the decision of the NATO powers occupying Kosova to hand over the former "buffer zone" — a strip of Serbian border territory mainly inhabited by Albanians — to the Serbian army. Further back, its roots lie in the flood of embittered, and often armed, Kosovars into Macedonia in 1999, when they fled from Serbia's attempt to wipe them out; and in the confidence gained by the Kosovars from their semi-independence — or, at least, escape from Serbian domination — under NATO rule since the 1999 war.

NATO bombed Serbia in 1999 because its leaders feared that the escalating conflict between Serbia's dictatorship and the insurgent Kosovar Albanians would spill over and destabilise the region. For years the big powers had advised the Kosovars to submit, and Serbia not to be too brutal. When, finally, Serbia refused to back down from the brink of full-scale war, NATO reckoned that a few bombs would soon

bring it into line. In the event NATO found itself with a bigger war than it had reckoned for.

The NATO powers, however, had never supported Kosovar rights — their aim was to keep the Kosovars quiet, rather than to win justice for them — and now there is talk of putting NATO troops into Macedonia to control the Albanians there and keep the Macedonian state intact.

Just yelling "troops out of the Balkans" would be a backhanded way of saying "let it rip", or "hand them all over to the Serbian army to do its worst". However, we can give no trust or political support to NATO in the Balkans. The only way out is a democratic settlement between the peoples of the region — based on rights to self-determination, to autonomy for minorities, and to full equal rights everywhere — which enables them to decide their own future free of big-power interference.

Sydney launch public meeting

# Socialist Alliance

"Socialist Alliance is a very exciting development. It offers a real alternative to the two-party tweedledum tweedledee of capitalism. I hope that lots of union activists and rank and file workers join the Alliance and that it develops into a real alternative for the future."  
**Craig Johnston,**  
Victorian state secretary,  
Australian Manufacturing  
Workers Union.



**Find out more and get involved.**  
Ph: 9690 1577 or 9261 4862 Email: [sydney@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:sydney@socialist-alliance.org)

**Tuesday, April 10**  
**7pm Trades Hall Auditorium**  
**4 Goulburn St, City**

[www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org)