

Workers' Liberty

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

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Socialist Alliance special issue

Socialist Alliance: Neither Old Labor nor Green, but independent working- class politics!

One argument put forward to advance socialist politics is that the Socialist Alliance should be trying to capture the disillusioned Labor vote by presenting Old Labor policies. This is put mainly by ISO supporters.

Old Labor, or 'True Labor' policies in themselves, are not going to attract a large number of people to vote for a small new party. And even if they did attract a reasonable vote, they are not going to help us to lay the foundation for a new political force. They will lay the foundation for repeating the errors of Old Labor, of which New Labor is simply the logical consequence. Let's start out with a political platform that is explicit and clear on some of the fundamentals that make us different from any previous version of Labour. We are for independent working-class struggle. We are for challenging the power of private ownership. We are for socialism, not state-regulated capitalism. And let's not give undeserved credit to Old Labor for being more of an anti-capitalist force than it actually ever was.

Another argument put is that the Greens represent the most progressive force in Australian politics. Indeed, the only significant platform difference between us and them is that in the longer run they are not for socialism, but for bourgeois parliamentary democracy and a mixed economy. Bob Brown's interview in the NSW Labor Council's *Workers Online* no. 102 shows him as a Green version of Old or True Labor, but without a base of affiliated trade unions. The Greens are likely to win seats in the Senate at least, making them much more appealing to voters who broadly support a shopping list of demands like those in the original Socialist Alliance draft platform. The Socialist Alliance is not going to win many of the votes that might go to the Greens if we do not manage to

make the issue of socialism more than a part of our name, and make class struggle a clear and immediate part of our campaign.

It will not be enough to equip us to fight to change the fundamental problem of Australian politics — the lack of a voice for working-class politics — if the Socialist Alliance Conference contents itself with a good shopping list of immediate demands. We must make it explicit in our election material, and our preference policy, that class struggle and socialism are fundamental and current aspects of our campaign. The ISO priority pledges are just the shopping list. The Workers' Liberty priority pledge is explicitly for working-class action, for socialism, and connects these principles to current politics in an understandable way. It can help the SA to advance political consciousness. If we only seek to galvanise existing opinion into a SA vote, much of this opinion will consider itself better served by voting Green.

The other key element of our campaign must be to engage in dialogue with groups already engaged in fighting for workers' rights and the kind of demands contained in the Socialist Alliance platform, and with voters who express interest in the SA campaign. Bringing our politics into the activities of unions and community campaigns which already exist can show how socialist ideas can be applied, enable us to learn from those who are engaged in struggle, and develop a base in the working-class movement without which our politics remain abstract.

Let's not repeat the history of failure

By Janet Burstall

We are new, but we are not the first to try to create a party to represent working class interests, to stand for socialism.

There have been two significant attempts in Australian history to create such a party, both of which have failed. If they had succeeded, we wouldn't be founding the Socialist Alliance.

The ALP formed by organised workers, in the 1890s in response to defeats of industrial struggles by a combination of employer resistance, and government use of armed police and compliant judges. Although ALP MPs were meant to represent the workers who put them in parliament, it wasn't long before they were doing deals. Militant workers organised to try to call their MPs to account. The ALP's platform from the start reflected a dominant view in the labour movement that the Australian state could ameliorate the position of workers by protecting them from both the worst excesses of the Australian employers and from the threat of competition from cheap labour in the Asia-Pacific. Class struggle was a last resort, to apply pressure on the state to accommodate workers demands within capitalist relations. Even the adoption and then strengthening of the 'socialisation objective' in response to the radicalisation of the anti-conscription period and the Russian revolution did not alter the fundamental commitment of the ALP to maintaining capitalism.

The Communist Party of Australia was formed in 1920 at a unity conference called by the Australian Socialist Party attended also by representatives of the Victorian Socialist Party and the NSW "Trades Hall Reds", some Wobblies and some sections of other small socialist groups. This regroupment was in response to the Russian Revolution. The unity was fragile, as there were many disagreements and differences of outlook contained within the young CPA. It didn't hammer out unity until it was brought under the direction of the Stalinised Moscow CP, not without struggle, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Despite an apparent agreement on the need for socialist revolution, the CPA did not agree on how to get there or what needed to be done here and now.

It is a huge simplification but to be brief, there is a general truth in saying that the ALP and the CPA failed for almost opposite reasons. The ALP had the working-class base, but failed on developing a socialist program or working-class independence from capital. The CPA had a socialist program but didn't translate that into becoming the leadership of the working class. A further complexity must be recognised – the CPA did not manage to develop its program, to synthesise and overcome the differences between its founders, and to develop a consistent approach to the working-class movement, even before the delayed influence of Stalinism began to be felt in Australia.

The Socialist Alliance can learn a lot from studying the history of attempts to create a socialist working-class movement in Australia. A serious attitude to developing the platform and methods of work with consideration as to how to relate to the working class is vital. The lessons of the past are that the euphoria of the success of simply

getting started, or of sharing worthwhile sentiments, are not sufficient to meet the needs of forging the kind of working-class party that is needed. We won't educate an effective alliance of socialists without continual, critical work on ideas and history to accompany our activism.

Anti-capitalist upsurge: What does it mean for the Socialist Alliance?

By Martin Thomas

The demonstration in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation in November-December 1999 has inspired many thousands across the world. It has provided a focus and model for the beginnings of a new generation of radicals, disgusted by the arrogance of exultant big capital and free of the depression soaked into many of their elders by the defeats of the 1980s and the triumph of private-profit economics in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Seattle and its sequels have helped galvanise some trade-union action, too. In Sydney, in June 2001, unions responded to plans by the New South Wales state Labor government to cut workers' compensation for injuries on the job by organising a picket of Parliament to stop Labor MPs going in to vote for the plans.

'New mood' or working-class strategy

Blockades by anti-capitalist demonstrators outside the World Economic Forum in Melbourne last September, and outside stock exchanges this May, must have helped inspire this action. But a series of demonstrations, even good ones, to "shut down" the IMF, the World Bank, the G8, and so on, do not amount to a strategy, or a solid basis for an ongoing movement. And they certainly do not amount to a "new mood" right across the working class. Strike figures and trade-union membership are still low in many countries, and radical-left votes still weak. In some countries — France, the USA, South Korea, Indonesia, all in their different ways — the current trends are more promising than in others, but in none of them is working-class political confidence positively high.

To recognise the facts is not to bow down to them, to fail to see the exceptions, contradictions, or signs of movement, or to think that change cannot come quickly. Nor is it an excuse for dawdling or a sniffy attitude to the "new anti-capitalist" activists. But a realistic grasp of where we are, and how far we have yet to go, is a necessary part of orienting ourselves politically, both in the bigger picture and with the "new anti-capitalist" youth. However important, inspiring and valuable the demonstrations, socialist revolution cannot emerge just from more and more demonstrations to "end this" and "shut down that".

Working-class revolutions are distinguished from all previous revolutions — where the people come out on the streets, and fight heroically, but have no means of systematically planning and collectively controlling the results — by mass organisation, preparation, and consciousness. The Marxist concept of socialist revolution is distinguished from anarchist and populist (all-the-people-together) concepts by its understanding of the centrality of independent working-class organisation, preparation and consciousness. The fact that the "new

anti-capitalist" mood expresses itself through direct action on the streets does not automatically make it revolutionary; and the strands within the mood that are revolutionary are not automatically working-class socialist-revolutionary. In *International Socialism* 90, John Rees writes: "Anti-capitalist movements are giving a particular coloration to every other movement of resistance against the system... Trade unionists are now being thrust into a politicised world..." But the "new anti-capitalist" moods and mobilisations are nowhere near definite enough, and big enough, to define the "world" for trade unionists. They are in fact moods and mobilisations — encompassing a vast variety of groups, from the social-democratic/liberal petitioner across to the wildest direct-actionist, with many socialists or potential socialists as well — rather than a single movement with a cohesion sufficient to set the frame for trade unionists. To think otherwise is to have our proportions all wrong. The workplaces, the trade unions, and the working-class neighbourhoods are the big picture, and the "anti-capitalist" moods and mobilisations a valuable leaven and source of activists — not vice versa. A real "new movement" — a revitalised workers' movement — will be built through painstaking activity in the workplaces and on the doorsteps, and through thorough discussion and education, not through any amount of loudspeaking about the "spirit of Seattle".

Tobin Tax

Alex Callinicos of the SWP-UK claims the Tobin Tax movement in France, ATTAC, as the prime example worldwide, of a "more or less organised political milieu where a new left is beginning to take shape" as an condensation of the general "new anti-capitalist" mood. In the first place, there is no special reason to consider ATTAC more "new" than the other recent sizeable left campaigns in France — AC (unemployed), DAL (homeless), Sans Papiers (migrant rights), etc. France has a more sizeable constituency of left-wing activists interested in such campaigns than other countries do, but these are by no means necessarily all "new" activists. In the second place, however much or little "new" ATTAC is, and however valuable or (in our view) not-so-valuable we think the Tobin Tax is as a partial demand, it is undeniable that ATTAC's focus on this demand — a tax of 0.25% or 0.5% on currency-exchange transactions — defines it as reformist. Whatever the merits or demerits of a proposal to tax the bourgeoisie to the extent of 0.25% or 0.5%, it is not revolutionary. Without sectarianism or pedantry, it is the job of Marxists to criticise, explain and argue politics. To be anti-capitalist is not necessarily to be socialist in the working-class sense. Marx concluded the Communist Manifesto by an examination of a variety of "socialisms" or "anti-capitalisms" current at that time which were quite distant from working-class socialism, or, in Marx's terminology, communism.

A similar variety could be analysed today: deep-green anti-capitalism, anarcho-populist anti-capitalism, and (it still exists) Stalinist anti-capitalism. Moreover, to call the mood "new anti-capitalist" is to exaggerate — hopefully, permissibly maybe, but still to exaggerate. Many participants are not against capital in general, but only against big capital, or multinational capital. Against global capital? Yes. But "global good, local good"? "Big bad, small good"? "Multinational bad, national good"? "Industrial bad, back-to-nature good"? No. For us, the real

axis is workers against capital, not "ordinary people" against "the multinationals". We are not against globalisation. We are for a workers' struggle for social levelling-up and political democracy, against the bosses' social levelling-down and bureaucratism.

We are for workers' globalisation against capitalist globalisation. Many on the left, however, use their picture of the "new anti-capitalist" mobilisations as "almost a revolution" to rationalise a different approach: on the one hand, frantic instructions to build the movement as wide as possible, and not to risk political criticism or discussion in case they slow things down; on the other, abstract counterpositions of "revolution" to "reform". The space in between, which should be filled by politics, they leave empty. They claim that to point to "destroying the IMF" or "smashing the WTO", rather than to "reforming" them, is to grasp the gist of revolution as against reform. But this misses the point. Of course the IMF and the WTO are vile capitalist institutions. What else would they be, when their job is to coordinate the capitalist world market? If they could somehow be separated off from the body of capitalism and "smashed" separately, it would get us no further forward. Either the big capitalist governments would set up replacements, different in detail but similar in essence. Or they would not — in which case capitalism would regress into a world of trade blocs and high trade barriers. To change world capitalism from the "top" — IMF, WTO — downwards is possible neither by "reform" nor by "smashing". "In any case", as Lenin wrote in 1917, "the slogan of the moment on the eve of the new revolution, during it, and on the morrow of it, must be proletarian organisation". There is no substitute. It means, not being stand-offish towards the "new anti-capitalist" youth, but understanding that the workplaces, the unions, and the labour movement are central.

Nursing home fiasco For resident-relative-worker control of aged care facilities

By Janet Burstall

Bronwyn Bishop, Minister for Aged Care, is in the news again over her management of aged care facilities. This time the profiteer who is in the spotlight — Ted Sent — is the biggest nursing home operator in the country. On account of its 838 approved places, his company Primelife Corp Ltd receives the single largest slice of the Government's \$4 billion a year nursing home bed subsidies. According to the *SMH* of 26 July he has been the director of "no less than 43 companies which have either been deregistered or placed in administration or receivership."

Standards of care in many homes are disgraceful. Staff turnover is high because nurses cannot stand not being able to care for people properly, and because there is an acute shortage of nurses in Australia. The accreditation and inspection system which is meant to regulate aged care provision has been exposed several times in the last couple of years.

Residents and their relatives and friends are distressed when the home they are in is found to be substandard, and the final response is to close it down. They would

generally rather see the home operate properly than be shut down.

No profit-taking from personal care.

What is the answer? Surely the aged, retired workers in need of extra physical care deserve better. How can this scandal be tackled?

The residents, the staff and the friends of relatives of residents are best placed to work out what needs to be done to provide quality accommodation and care in any particular home. Their plans for physical improvements, staffing levels, cleaning, food, activities, resident rights and so on should be the basis on which the accommodation is run. The government subsidies to the facility should be paid to a representative committee of residents or their delegated friends and relatives, and the staff. Profit-making owners should not be running aged care with government subsidies.

This policy is a basis for socialists to approach nursing unions, pensioner bodies and other representative groups of the aged. Together we could reach residents of nursing homes and their friends and relatives, nursing and other staff, with an answer to the problem. We should advocate that they get together and set up their own committees to plan how best to run their aged care facilities and we should support and encourage them in their demands to receive the government subsidies. Furthermore, we would encourage them to calculate the cost of care at the level they think is needed, also paying the staff properly, and we would support demands for government funding to provide this.

There are indeed many other issues to be tackled, not the least of which is the general shortage of nurses. If socialists take the approach recommended here, it would provide a forum for this and other issues to be further exposed and support for a comprehensive program to deal with many of the problems confronting aged people who need physical care — quality of life, personal care, dependence and independence, freedom and sexuality, and conditions of work for carers.

Debate:

What future for the Socialist Alliance? Aston: The worst result for radical socialists in over thirty-five years?

By Lev Lafayette

Honesty is a good policy, so let us not lie to either ourselves or the recently radicalised young comrades among us. Life is too short to be dishonest to ourselves and it is grossly unfair to mislead our younger comrades with clever excuses. They will, with all justification, react with permanent antipathy when they realise the extent of such deception. They've joined us because they believe we are sincere when we say we want to build a better world. Let's not disappoint them.

So let us admit that the Aston by-election was a poor result for the Socialist Alliance. To receive just three hundred votes out of ninety thousand, with eighty campaign workers and one hundred and fifty volunteers on election day is an appalling misallocation of scarce left-wing resources. The result in Aston is one of the worst in the House of Representatives (from over one

hundred and thirty-five contested) for the radical left since at least 1966. The vote of 0.42% is only better than the 0.21% "achieved" by the Democratic Socialist Party in Patterson (1998), the Socialist Equality Party in Hunter (1998), the Democratic Socialist Party's 0.40% vote in Kingston (1990), the Socialist Workers' Party 0.30% for Wills (1980), and the Socialist Party of Australia's 0.30% result for Capricornia (1980). The Alliance was outpolled by 'informal' votes by a ratio of 12 to 1, came twelfth out of fifteen candidates and had a best booth result of 1.1 percent (i.e., 13 votes out of 1195).

Despite this result the public statements by Socialist Alliance are strangely positive. "This represents an excellent start for the alliance", claimed the Aston campaign coordinator. *Green Left Weekly* announced the result with the headline "Socialist Alliance Passes First Test". It is imperative that the Socialist Alliance reconsiders these public statements and work out what has gone wrong. Consider these as a starting point: (i) the vital need for a co-ordinated socialist strategy and (ii) the need for socialist policies.

The need for a coordinated socialist strategy

Socialist Alliance was established as an electoral alliance between its constituent parts. Achieving that degree of unity is a feat in itself in these renowned sectarian political netherlands. It is to be commended. Yet the Alliance must now determine its relationship with other parties and organisations. It needs to work out whether establishes working relations with friendly forces in other organisations, or if it is going to act with antipathy. This is the most serious strategic decision the Alliance can make.

It is historically evident that a strong left movement outside the Labor Party has helped the left wing within the Labor Party. When the two have acted in unison, despite differences, substantial reforms have been achieved (1900-1920s, 1940s, 1960s-1970s). When the two movements have acted antithetical towards each other, (1920s, late 1940s, mid-1980 onwards) both have suffered. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

From our perspective, with half the energy expended on the Aston campaign, Josephine Cox, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Aston, could have been the ALP candidate. A person with such serious left-wing politics could have, like other radical ALP parliamentary members, exerted influence over the politics of the nation. This would have been influence from which the radical could begin to achieve its objectives. Those in the radical, socialist and communist left of the ALP would have considered that to be a great achievement. It is strongly recommended that the Socialist Alliance utilise at least tactical entrust tactics in the ALP. Members and supporters of Socialist Alliance are encouraged to read history and relearn the successful use of this tactic in the past.

In Sydney last month, the 'Now, We The People' conference was held. Organised by the SEARCH Foundation, with some three-hundred and seventy individuals present, it included Labor, Democrat and Green parliamentarians, members of the former Communist Party of Australia and a wide-range of senior union and community figures. Whilst an important meeting with wide-ranging political and social influence,

the political strategy adopted was undeniably reformist and short-term.

Is Socialist Alliance merely going to be the complement of this conference? Instead of adopting a reformist and short-term political strategy with significant political influence, like the Now We The People group, is Socialist Alliance going to adopt radical and long-term political strategy, but remain in the Aston-like wilderness? Surely this is not the only option available to progressives in Australia. Surely it is possible to announce a long-term, radical political strategy with significant political influence?

At this stage, Socialist Alliance must consider a broader view. As an electoral alliance only, it will clearly act solely within the confines of its constituent parties. It is hoped, however, that the Alliance's first priority is not the electoral arena, but the implementation of socialist policies.

To achieve this, it is recommended a broad-based, national, socialist steering committee be established so all left-wing organisations and individuals can co-ordinate and prioritise their actions and resources. That is, for diverse left-wing organisations to maintain their separate identities and electoral alliances, but to work together in extra-parliamentary action.

Such a steering committee should include, but would not be restricted to, the Socialist Alliance parties and organisations, non-SA socialist parties, Green Party socialists, the far left of the ALP, anarcho-sydicalists etc.

The Need for socialist policies

Apart from a nationally-coordinated socialist strategy, which presumably Socialist Alliance will not oppose, there is also need for clear socialist politics. This is one area in which the Socialist Alliance is sadly lacking. The platform of Socialist Alliance contains laudable, but completely reformist, policies.

The Socialist Alliance draft policies makes no mention of public ownership of infrastructure industries. There is no mention of democratic control over the means of production, let alone even partial industrial democracy. There is no mention of community control of their local environment and decentralised essential industries. There is no mention of automatic union membership. There is no mention of Constitutional or electoral reform.

There are continuing rumours of a preamble to the platform that proposes the socialisation of the means of production and the introduction of economic democracy with management determined by the community and workers. This is an example of good socialist policy, albeit underdeveloped. Yet where was it on the Socialist Alliance website during the Aston by-election, or for that matter their election material? It is bizarre that the only uniquely socialist statement from the platform is not publicly promoted by an organisation calling itself 'Socialist Alliance'!

Let us assume this is an oversight, in which case the Alliance needs to develop a notion of socialist policy. After all, the past century taught us a great deal about what sort of socialist management systems work and which ones don't. We've seen experimentations in workers self-management, market-socialism, state-directed socialism, nationalisation and so forth. The available evidence to date suggests that each of these types of social ownership have advantages peculiar to each industry.

As a contribution to the draft platform the following is recommended:

That the Socialist Alliance advocate State ownership, directed planning, and regulation of centralised infrastructure industries (natural monopolies, banking, energy utilities, health, telecommunications, postage, air, roads, rail, waterways, public transport and welfare).

That the Socialist Alliance advocates social ownership, government regulation and indicative planning for decentralised infrastructure industries (credit unions, preventative health, education, housing, parklands).

That the Socialist Alliance supports public and private enterprise in consumer goods and in personal wealth. Opposition to attempts to censor victimless information, arts and entertainment providers (e.g. literature, film, music, radio, the Internet).

and, across all industries,

That the Socialist Alliance supports automatic union membership to independent trade unions with provision for conscientious objection.

These are, of course, not the only recommendations that could be made. However, if one takes socialist policies as a practical objective rather than a vague ideal, it is imperative from the outset that it is explicitly stated what sort of socialism is being advocated.

Australia has a significant radical tradition; people are supportive of socialist policies, but deeply cynical and suspicious of the term. They need to be informed how in reality we are going to make socialism work.

That is the task for socialist policy makers — not just a wish list of good intentions, as the Socialist Alliance platform currently appears. The medium let alone the long-term future of Socialist Alliance is under some doubt. Major issues at the forthcoming Alliance conference seem to be whether it remains a diverse electoral alliance or whether to build a unified left party. Will the current fractures appearing in the British Socialist Alliance have, once again, repercussions in the Australian arena?

These must be secondary issues. The primary issue should be not the future of Socialist Alliance, but what Socialist Alliance is going to do for the future. That should be about achieving national co-ordination of progressive forces and setting itself radical, yet achievable, socialist objectives.

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(For ongoing debate around the ideas in this article go to the Workers' Liberty open discussion list at www.yahoogroups.com/list/workersliberty.

A reply will be printed in the next issue -Ed.)

A Socialist alternative in Britain? Will the unions fight for a political alternative to Blair?

By Violet Martin

The following article comes from the British bi-monthly Action for Solidarity. In reporting the ferment among unionists disgusted with the continuing betrayals of Tony Blair's New Labour government a contrast is made with the Australian labour movement. Traditionally the relationship between the union movement in each country and their respective Labor/Labour parties has been close. That relationship in Britain has been severely tested. But is it the same in Australia today? In both cases the task of socialists is to promote "mass independent working class politics".

It is a common figure in fiction. A man goes to the factory each day, year after year. He tells the people at home that he is valued and important at work. In fact he is being made more and more menial and marginal. Then he is sacked. He can't cope. He covers up. He continues to pack his briefcase and pretend to go to work each day. He juggles to fill the financial holes. He invents stories about work to tell the people at home.

Britain's trade union leaders have been with politics like that character with work. Regularly they have told their members they are off to do politics, with the Labour Party. They have boasted to their members that in the Labour Party they are partly running the show, not just menials.

Now New Labour has pretty much "sacked" the unions, letting them in the "factory" only to do a bit of menial work in exchange for tips. And the "folks at home" — the union members — are wising up. Since the election victory on 7 June, New Labour has declared plans to chop up public services further and parcel them out to profiteers.

This new slap in the face for the unions has provoked a flux and ferment in union politics such as has not been seen for 100 years. The unions need to engage with politics, just as much as people need to go out to work. What has passed for the unions' engagement in politics now has a searchlight beam on it which shows it up to be largely a sham. There are three possible ways out

- The unions could get together to reassert themselves and restore "the political labour movement" as a reality.
- The unions could abandon politics. They could become "business unions", each union concerned only with its dues income and the wages-and-conditions deals it can negotiate with the bosses in its sector.
- Or the unions could turn to narrow-minded, pragmatic, lobby-group politics, trying to trade political support and funds for favours with a variety of MPs — Liberal-Democrat, New Labour, or even Tory.

The unprecedented turbulence in union politics over the last few weeks has shown that all three possibilities are in play. The outcome depends in large measure on what union activists and socialists do now.

On 23 May the Fire Brigades Union conference, against the wishes of the union leadership, resolved to open the possibility of union money being used to back election candidates against New Labour if they are more in line with union policy. The FBU did not, as some have

suggested, "break the link with New Labour", or withhold money from the Labour Party; but it did send ripples across the union movement.

The conference of the post and telecom union CWU, soon after, voted down a similar motion two-to-one. But the CWU already has standing policy to withdraw support from Labour if it privatises the Post Office — and Blair's Government seems set on doing just that.

Soon after the election, the leaders of the public services union UNISON and the general unions TGWU and GMB started talking about a fight against Blair over privatisation. John Edmonds of the GMB talked to the press about a "snowstorm of resolutions" against privatisation at the Labour Party conference in October, though he pointedly did not say that the GMB would itself put in a resolution.

On 21 June UNISON conference voted for a review of the union's political funds. That vote, like the FBU one, was carried against the conference platform. The conference also voted, with the union leaders' support, for "strikes when deemed necessary, a national day of action and a national demonstration against privatisation, with a lobby of parliament".

Tony Blair called the top union leaders to dinner at Downing Street on 27 June, and toned down his language on privatisation. But ferment continued.

On 29 June the conference of the rail union RMT resolved: "that it cannot and will not support a Labour Government that has deserted its working-class roots and supporters and jumps into bed with its big business friends. It therefore declares that, unless these disastrous policies are changed, we will no longer support them politically or financially".

The RMT already has conference policy to withdraw union sponsorship from any Labour MP who fails to support rail renationalisation, though the union leadership has so far done nothing to implement that policy.

Over the weekend, Bill Morris of the TGWU publicly speculated about his union organising joint campaigns over public services with the Liberal Democrats. The TGWU logo might appear on Lib-Dem posters.

The GMB coyly failed to deny press reports that it might help field "pro-public services" trade-union (or union-backed) candidates in next May's local authority elections.

On 4 July the GMB announced it would send postcards to Labour MPs with a picture of Dr Richard Taylor, who won a seat in the general election as a "Health Concern" independent. The postcards will say, "He stood up for public services, will you?" GMB general secretary John Edmonds said: "Tony Blair has claimed he has a mandate of support from the public for his public sector privatisation plans. We intend to put that claim to the test. Our campaign is just asking a simple question, 'Will you stand up for public services in the same way Dr Taylor did'. If the answer to that question is, 'no', then obviously it will be very hard for our members to support MPs who are prepared to see our public services effectively privatised out of existence".

The TGWU and the GMB also told the press that they might vote to block Tony Blair's choice for the new chair of the Labour Party, Charles Clarke.

As we go to press, the TGWU conference is meeting, and has a motion before it to seek "alternative ways of using the political fund, other than large donations being made to the Labour Party election fund". An amendment

suggests the union "donates money to parliamentary candidates prepared to support union policies if elected to Parliament".

The New Labour leadership has taken these stirrings seriously enough to respond. According to *Tribune* (29 June): "Labour's high command are attempting to forestall a potential row with the trade union movement at the party's conference in October by manipulating party rules.

"A hastily convened National Policy Forum meeting is to be held on July 28 at Millbank [Labour Party HQ]. It is expected that the meeting will simply create a number of policy commissions that will be given the task of beginning the development of Labour's rolling policy programme and laying the basis for Labour's next manifesto.

"The remit of the policy commissions is anticipated to be so wide-ranging that it will prevent the unions and grassroots activists from debating issues that are of particular concern at conference — the most important of which will be the future of the public services".

The same week, the *Financial Times* reported that Labour's leaders are preparing a constitutional amendment, to go to the October conference, which will empower them to disaffiliate any union which supports a non-Labour candidate in an election.

Unions still have power

The unions still have the voting power at Labour Party conference to insist that public services be debated, or to stop the gagging amendment. None of the union leaders have given any pledge to use that power. "The objective of the [Labour-union] link", said Dave Prentis of UNISON on 2 July, "must be that we take UNISON policy into the Labour Party", but he has made no specific commitment to UNISON's representatives on Labour's National Executive doing that.

Ambiguity, evasiveness, grandstanding — the union leaders' stance has much of all those. The recent upheavals may lead to nothing very decisive for a while yet. Or complexities and untidiness may emerge without fundamental change.

The Australian labour movement has historically been very similar in structure to the British. It has a continuing and strong structural link between the unions and the Labor Party. The unions only recently stopped electricity privatisation in New South Wales by voting down the state government at a Labor Party conference. Yet the unions frequently collaborate on campaigns with the Democrats (a centre party roughly analogous to the Lib-Dems), and it is not unusual for unions to disaffiliate from Labor over particular disputed issues and then to reaffiliate later.

The balance of evidence, though, is that the current ferment in Britain runs much deeper. New Labour has developed a political machine which has no use for the unions — except as cash-cows which make no demands, for so long as they are willing to play that role.

The Blair faction has progressively shut down the Labour Party's democratic channels. The working class has been largely disenfranchised. We have been deprived of even that measure of independent working-class political representation which the old, federal, union-dominated, and relatively democratic Labour Party used to provide.

All these are not just last week's headline news. They are solid trends of several years' evolution. The recent

union conference votes and the mass working-class abstention on 7 June are two indications that increasing numbers of working-class people see these trends and, in different ways, seek responses.

Support working class politics

Standing pat, repeating traditional Labour formulas, and relying on business-as-usual, is not an option. Sooner or later, one way or another, union politics will change. If socialists fail to fight for it to move forwards, then we will, by default, contribute to it moving backwards.

The best possibilities are those built on the recent talk of challenging the Blair faction at Labour conference and, as necessary, through independent trade-union and socialist candidates in elections. Such moves would point to a fight to reclaim the Labour Party from the Blair faction and — since the Blair faction would split rather than face a serious union challenge — to the creation of a new mass workers' party based on the trade unions.

Some people in the Socialist Alliance say that this perspective is futile nostalgia. For example, an article by Mike Marqusee in the latest *International Socialism* journal gives a good and clear account of the recent transformations in the Labour Party. It explains why "engaging in the party's internal debate" was important. But that was the past. Now that "the admixture has qualitatively changed" in the Labour Party (as Marqusee accurately describes it), he seems to drop the whole idea of trying to rally the unions for independent working-class politics.

"We don't want to reinvent the Labour Party. Even if we wanted to we couldn't — history has moved on".

But why should the strategic priority of fighting to reorient the mass labour movement fall just because the tactical choice for socialists of being active in the Constituency Labour Parties and renouncing independent electoral action has become barren?

No-one can bring back "the Labour Party" just as it was in 1900, nor should socialists particularly want to. But we can, should, and do want to "reinvent" a new "Labour", or mass working-class, party. If it is to be really a mass working-class party, it should be based on, or linked to, the existing mass united organisations of the working class — the trade unions. Authentic socialism can advance only through independent working-class politics, not through any substitutes or bypasses.

Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class..." [i.e. into an organised, conscious class, a "class for itself"]. 33 years later, Engels repeated the idea, in an article addressed to the activists of the British trade unions, which by then were much stronger: "The position of Trades Unions must change considerably. They will no longer enjoy the privilege of being the only organisations of the working class. At the side of, or above, the Unions of special trades there must spring up a general Union, a political organisation of the working class as a whole..."

For mass independent working-class politics to leap up from the grave into which the Blair faction is currently lowering it is, however, not the only possibility in the present situation. Complete withdrawal of the unions from politics is unlikely. However, as Kevin Maguire has written in the *Guardian* (26 June): "As traditional loyalties wane,

shopping around will also produce results, and a number of Liberal Democrat as well as Plaid Cymru and Scottish National party candidates at the last election promised more to the unions, particularly in the public sector, than some of the Labour figures they backed".

This "shopping around" would be a great step backwards. It would reduce the labour movement to a lobby group, doing deals with big-business parties to see who will throw the best sops. In fact it would fragment the labour movement into a variety of lobby groups, each backing particular parties or MPs more responsive to its particular sectional concerns. It would destroy the idea of working-class solidarity and common purpose in politics.

If the left in the unions confines itself to the sort of agitation favoured by Socialist Worker — "Make the break with New Labour!" — then, by default, we will be throwing what weight we have towards that alternative of "shopping around". It is the alternative that "goes with the grain" of the established political balance of forces. Scatter iron filings, and they move towards the strongest magnetic pole. So long as unions judge "pragmatically" and "realistically" — and they will, unless socialists can win the arguments to make them do otherwise — the Socialist Alliance, with our 1.62% of the vote in less than one-fifth of the parliamentary constituencies, is a much weaker magnetic pole than the Lib-Dems or nationalists.

Negative agitation against New Labour is not enough. Our positive answer, and the measuring-rod by which we condemn New Labour, must be independent working-class politics. Engels again: "The working class has interests of its own, political as well as social... The working men find it necessary to organise themselves as an independent Party... The organised Trades would do well to consider... that the time is rapidly approaching when the working class of this country will claim, with a voice not to be mistaken, its full share of representation in Parliament... For [that] organisations will become necessary, not of separate Trades, but of the working class as a body".

Two nations, two states — the solution for Palestinians and Israelis

By Chris Reynolds

On 31 July the Israeli peace group Gush Shalom called on the United Nations Security Council and the European Union to send military forces to intervene in the West Bank and Gaza. The appeal was triggered by Israel's bombing of an office of the Islamist movement Hamas in the West Bank city of Nablus — an attack which killed two children as well as six adults — and encouraged by the 22 July statement from the G8 (the big powers) in favour of international "monitors" in the West Bank and Gaza. It is a desperate clutching at straws, a measure of how far the internal forces in Israel/Palestine are from a democratic resolution of the conflict.

If forces from the big powers were put in to the West Bank and Gaza, there is no chance that they would fight the Israeli attacks which have taken over 500 Palestinian lives in recent months — the US, after all, arms Israel —

and very little chance that they would fight the Islamicists responsible for many of the 130 Israeli deaths. And in fact the big powers have no interest in putting themselves on the front line. A few international monitors after some deal has been fixed, maybe, but that is all.

The US offers no solution

To look to the big powers, and the USA in particular, to make peace in Israel/Palestine, is to live in illusions. The fundamental requirement for peace is still that Israel should recognise the Palestinians' right to an independent state of their own. That means Israeli military withdrawal from the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza (and East Jerusalem), and ceding of full independence to the resulting Palestinian polity, including such basic necessities as control over adequate water supplies. It is not true that then Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, in the US-sponsored talks last year, offered the Palestinians a near-enough or workable version of that requirement.

Full details of what was on the table have never been published, but a comment by Palestinian negotiators, published in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 24 July, fits with everything else that is known. "Israel's proposal divided Palestine into four separate cantons surrounded by Israel: the Northern West Bank, the Central West Bank, the Southern West Bank and Gaza. Going from any one area to another would require crossing Israeli sovereign territory and consequently subject movement of Palestinians within their own country to Israeli control. Not only would such restrictions apply to the movement of people, but also to the movement of goods, in effect subjecting the Palestinian economy to Israeli control. Lastly, the proposal would have left Israel in control over all Palestinian borders, thereby allowing Israel to control not only internal movement of people and goods but international movement as well. Such a Palestinian state would have had less sovereignty and viability than the Bantustans created by the South African apartheid government. The proposal required Palestinians to give up any claim to the occupied portion of Jerusalem.

The proposal would have forced recognition of Israel's annexation of all of Arab East Jerusalem. Talks after Camp David suggested that Israel was prepared to allow Palestinians sovereignty over isolated Palestinian neighborhoods in the heart of East Jerusalem, however such neighborhoods would remain surrounded by illegal Israeli colonies and would remain separated not only from each other but also from the rest of the Palestinian state. In effect, such a proposal would create Palestinian ghettos in the heart of Jerusalem".

New Intifada

The other decisive problem with Barak's proposals is that he presented them as a "final offer", take-it-or-leave-it. They were available to the Palestinians only if they accepted them not as an interim deal, but as a final and complete settlement. So new violence exploded after the visit by Ariel Sharon (and hundreds of Israeli troops) to Temple Mount late last September. This violence, though called "the new intifada", has brought none of the progress that was won by the intifada of the 1980s. The Palestinians in the occupied territories have suffered economic devastation from Israel's closing of borders, which cuts them off from jobs in Israel, on top of the corruption and autocracy of Arafat's administration.

As the violence has spiralled, ultra-chauvinist Israeli settlers in the occupied territories have used the opportunity to step up their drive to "establish facts" there.

The Jerusalem-based Alternative Information Centre notes "massive energy devoted expressly to agricultural destruction, a measure that seeks to undermine the infrastructure of the Palestinian economy and to destroy the livelihood of farmers in specific regions... The increasing organisation of the settler attacks has evolved into something akin to paramilitary exercises and established militias". The Israeli army is complicit. A ceasefire agreed under US influence on 13 June never operated fully, and is now defunct. The way that violence is spiralling is illustrated by a letter from a Palestinian published in *Ha'aretz* (29 July). "We live every night under bombing by the tanks and machine guns of your army... Ten days ago, in the middle of the night, my neighbours' nine year old girl, Marva al-Sharif was sleeping peacefully in her bed and a bullet entered through the window and hit her right in the brain and now she is clinically dead... "I am a peace-loving Palestinian. For many years I have been telling my friends and neighbours that we need to give peace and the Oslo agreement a chance. But nowadays, what can I tell my neighbours, the al-Sharif family, who returned from the hospital crazy with anger and sorrow?... If you build a unity government against the Palestinian people, what can I tell our people who say that we need also a Palestinian unity government with Hamas and Islamic Jihad?" Elements in the new Israeli government, under right-winger Ariel Sharon, have talked about resolving the conflict by an outright invasion of the areas of the occupied territories which are now supposed to be Palestinian-controlled. Such a move would probably pitch Israel into more conflict with the USA than it is ready to take on. But putting this "extreme" option on the table may facilitate the more "moderate" one which Barak had already proposed when he was Prime Minister: "unilateral separation". That means the Israeli government simply sealing off certain Palestinian-controlled areas in the West Bank and Gaza, leaving them to Palestinian rule, but effectively annexing the rest of the occupied territories to permanent Israeli rule and cutting off movements of goods and people between Israel's realm and the Palestinians. It would indeed be a "Bantustan" solution, only worse.

Two states for two peoples is the only feasible and democratic alternative to this appalling scenario, and the only basis on which Israeli-Arab working-class unity can be sought.

West's hypocrisy over Milosevic

By Martin Thomas

It is good news that Slobodan Milosevic, the former president of Yugoslavia, is on trial for war crimes. The pity is that he has been brought not before a tribunal of representatives of the different peoples of ex-Yugoslavia, but before a court, in The Hague, organised by governments who share some responsibility for

Milosevic's war crimes and have committed many war crimes of their own.

The NATO governments pushed Serbia's government into extraditing Milosevic by crude bribery — \$900 million straight away if the government produced Milosevic, not a penny if it did not. Now they will use the trial to puff themselves as the world's champion enforcers of human rights.

One precedent is the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders, organised after World War 2 by the victorious Allies. The Nazi leaders deserved to be put on trial. But who ran the trial? The US government, which had used nuclear weapons to flatten the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the war was already effectively won. And, even more macabrely, Stalin's government in the USSR, which had conducted a reign of terror against its own people even more extensive than Hitler's against the majority of the people of Germany and the countries it occupied during the war.

Greater Serbia

As secretary of the Communist Party in Serbia, Milosevic raised himself to supreme power amidst the collapse of the old "Communist" order by launching a demagogic nationalist campaign against the autonomy from Serbia of Albanian-inhabited Kosova (April 1987).

Branka Magas, a Marxist chronicler of the destruction of the old federal Yugoslavia, writes: "By the end of the 1980s... it had become clear that, unless Milosevic was stopped, Yugoslavia was doomed either to become a Greater Serbia or to fall apart. Yugoslavia did not die a natural death: it was destroyed for the cause of a Greater Serbia".

Laura Silber and Allan Little, mainstream journalists, confirm the judgment in their book. "Yugoslavia did not die a natural death but... was deliberately and systematically killed off... The book traces Milosevic's conscious use of nationalism as a vehicle to achieve power and then to strengthen his control first over Serbia, and then over Yugoslavia. His centralising, authoritarian, anti-democratic leadership, and his calculated, clever manipulation of the politics of ethnic intolerance, provoked the other nations of Yugoslavia, convincing them that it was impossible to stay in the federation".

Yugoslav federalism had always depended on delicate balances and, worse, bureaucratically-administered ones. Of course there were grievances on all sides. In the ferment caused by the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, Milosevic seized on the grievances of the Serbs, the biggest of the nations in Yugoslavia, and from them constructed a programme for a Greater Serbia.

He grabbed control of the Yugoslav army. When Slovenia and Croatia voted for independence in 1991, he went to war against both of them.

He quickly gave up on Slovenia, but seized — and waged terror — in one-third of Croatia before he was finally forced to withdraw.

Alarmed and isolated, Bosnia in turn voted for independence in April 1992. Immediately, Serb military units crossed the border to seize territory and subject it to "ethnic cleansing". The war in Bosnia went on until 1995.

Throughout, Kosova — a territory never voluntarily part of Yugoslavia, but conquered by Serbian force in 1913 and again after World War 2 — was subjected to escalating repression from Serbia. And throughout the big

powers gave Milosevic their toleration at least, and often their semi-support.

If Milosevic, as the local "strong man", was able to keep ex-Yugoslavia together as a single unit for business, trade and investment, then — in their view — his merits far outweighed any crimes against democracy.

In 1991 the European Union finally conceded Slovene and Croatian self-determination. But when the war came in Bosnia, the big powers enforced an arms embargo that actually worked as a one-sided blockade against the Bosnian government forces. They wanted peace — but through a deal with Milosevic over the heads of the Bosnian people.

In Kosova the big powers supported Milosevic, with criticisms, as they support the Macedonian government now against its compact Albanian minority, right up until 1999. Then, alarmed and annoyed by Milosevic's intransigence, and fearful that Albanian resistance to it could destabilise the region, they decided to insist. They thought a few bombs would force Milosevic to negotiate, as he had done over Bosnia. Actually it took much longer. Kosovars massacred and driven out of their homes in the atrocious new offensive which Milosevic ordered to "create facts" in face of the NATO bombing, and ordinary Serb workers under the bombs, paid the price for 12 years of big-power refusal to recognise Kosovar self-determination, even in words.

Suharto of Indonesia, Sharon of Israel, and the US politicians who ran the "Contra" war against Nicaragua, will not follow Milosevic to the tribunal. The double standards are rotten and rank. But no socialist or democrat should shed any tears for Milosevic.

Indonesia after Wahid

By Martin Thomas

In his last efforts to hold on to Indonesia's presidency before he was ousted on 23 July, Abdurrahman Wahid talked about declaring a state of emergency, dissolving parliament and ruling directly through the police and the army instead. The police and the army responded bluntly, by parking 70 tanks and armoured cars opposite his office, with their guns aimed in his direction. The army refused martial law, and preferred parliamentary rule. But it is parliamentary rule by permission of the army.

The parliament voted unanimously to depose Wahid. Even his own party, the PKB, mounted no struggle against him being replaced. Matori Abdul Djailil, chair of the PKB, commented: "We warned him. But he likes to do his own thing". Leaders of the Islamic mass movement linked to Wahid, the Nahdatul Ulama, were also quiet. Wahid's own brother explained that the NU would be calling no mass protests because "we couldn't guarantee there wouldn't be anarchy". Indonesia's parliament replaced Wahid by his former vice-president Megawati Sukarnoputri. Megawati leads the biggest party in parliament, the PDI-P, and was a candidate for president when Wahid was chosen, in October 1999. Then, the army, its allies, and the Islamic parties considered Wahid the safer option. Although Megawati promised nothing radical — and was preferred by some big-business figures because a government led by her might have more political authority to impose IMF-ordered economic

plans on Indonesia — the majority of Indonesia's conservative forces then considered that her status as a figurehead of the democratic movement against the old Suharto dictatorship might mean her becoming president would boost popular expectations too much.

Megawati's turn to stabilise capitalism

Now Wahid has done his bit. Megawati can become president without people expecting great reforms to follow. According to the *Financial Times*: "In Jakarta, Mr Wahid appears to have little support among the working classes". There is also little sign of mass jubilation about Megawati becoming president, of the sort there might have been two years ago. Wahid, from the point of view of the ruling class, was too erratic — perhaps because of his shaky health — and not needed as a bulwark against Megawati.

The biggest left group in Indonesia, the PRD (close to the DSP in Indonesia), argues that Wahid's removal was a counter-revolution, or the beginning of a counter-revolution. "Golkar [the old ruling party under the dictatorship] and the Indonesian Armed Forces are back in power. The success [in ousting Wahid] of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Special Session is the real evidence that the forces of New Order have tied up the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and the [Islamic] forces successfully... Megawati, as new president, of course will pave the way for the return of the New Order [i.e. old regime] forces". This assessment is in line with recent PRD policy, of seeking the broadest cross-class alliance against the anti-Wahid agitation — and flatly contradictory to previous PRD policy, of seeking the broadest cross-class alliance to push Megawati for president. From the angle of independent working-class politics, both policies were flawed. Their contradictoriness suggests that a search for cross-class alliances around whatever at the time appears "progressive" is no reliable compass in politics. The assessment is also confused in its own right. If the forces of the old dictatorship are already "back in power", then there is no need for Megawati to "pave the way" for their return. And in fact the candidates of both Golkar and the army lost out in the vice-presidential elections, victory going to an Islamic candidate who is conservative enough but not a man of the old regime. Wahid was not a left-wing alternative to the parliament; the parliament is not a hardened right-wing alternative to him. On a fundamental level, there is no need for the old regime forces to come "back" to power. They have never lost power. The army, unpurged and unreformed, is still the backbone of the state. Wahid irritated the army by occasional outbursts, but did nothing to change that. On a different, but still significant, level, the army was forced to change its mode of power by the mass upheavals of 1998. It had to move into the background, allow relatively free elections, give space for independent trade unions to develop.

That change has not been reversed. It is not secure so long as the army remains unpurged and strong, but it has not been reversed. To say that it has already been reversed — that the New Order dictatorship is already restored, or on an irresistible roll towards being restored — is to say that the mass awakening of 1998 has already been crushed and neutralised. It is utterly defeatist. Independent trade unions continue to expand and multiply. The legal openings for opposition activity are still

there. The grand coalition to replace Wahid — army-Golkar-Islamic-Megawati coalition — offers the unions and the left opposition forces a sharp political lesson. If workers put their trust in populist bourgeois reformers as alternatives to the old right wing, they will be deceived and betrayed. The way forward lies through independent working-class politics. Only if the workers' organisations fail to learn that lesson will the new democratic openings eventually be extinguished.

Socialist Alliance jobs policy

By Martin Thomas

Chris Spindler has presented "ideas for a Socialist Alliance jobs policy" in the Alliance's Discussion Bulletin 3. They contain some good proposals. The shorter working week with no loss of pay is vital; so is expropriation of companies which threaten mass job cuts. I'd add: expansion of public services (and therefore of useful public service jobs) through taxing the rich and big business; and workers' control over reorganisation or reconversion of industry.

But I think two of Chris's proposals - a freeze on tariffs, and the Tobin Tax - weaken the programme rather than strengthening it. The proposal for a small percentage tax on foreign-exchange transactions, made by the very mainstream US economist James Tobin, is certainly more welcome than calls for cuts in public-service spending, or increased indirect taxes on working-class consumers. We do not need to hector or denounce Tobin Tax supporters. But should we throw our weight behind them? The Tobin

Tax it is neither a realistic interim 'quick-fix' to be effective, it would have to be implemented by every major government in the world acting simultaneously, or else foreign-exchange business would simply move to sites without the tax nor a step towards mobilising the working class against the bosses, nor a fundamental challenge to the privileges of capital.

If the working class were strong and coordinated enough worldwide to enforce the Tobin Tax, then it would be strong and coordinated to focus on measures much more central to class relations and it should do so. As for the tariffs proposal, Chris partially answers it himself. "Increasing tariffs doesn't work. In the 1930s tariffs were at their highest ever and still one third of the workforce was unemployed. It's not the workers overseas that should be targeted..." He also rejects the call to "buy Australian".

But tariffs as a means of job-saving are inseparable from "buy Australian". They are supposed to do by market incentives what "buy Australian" campaigns do through moral incentives - funnel demand to Australian-based firms rather than overseas-based ones, and thus hopefully make those Australian firms maintain or increase their workforces. And if increasing tariffs doesn't work, why should we think that freezing tariffs at their existing levels will?

At the very best tariffs save a few jobs in import-threatened industries in Australia, short-term, at the expense of workers outside Australia (and maybe of workers in export-oriented industries within Australia). They are no long-term solution. And they cut directly against the international workers' unity which, as Chris points out, is essential to a successful fight for jobs.

Join the fight for class struggle politics in the labour movement today!

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