

Workers' Liberty



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

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Howard's back: 2002 the fight begins again

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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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Howard's back, the fight goes on

Janet Burstall

So Howard is PM for another three years, Tony Abbott will be trying to smash unions and Ruddock is still the Minister for Racism. What do we do now?

It's not surprising that the parliamentary ALP's starting point is "how do we win the next election?" But we can't afford to be constrained by Crean's ambition to win government by creating a Blairite-styled New Labour, or US Democrat Party, with no union links. We continue to fight to build up union strength, to save jobs, for public health and education, to protect the environment, for women's rights, for indigenous rights, for refugee rights, against the power of global capital. Labor's policies in government wouldn't meet our demands, and the direction Crean seems to have in mind would make it even more necessary for us to campaign.

Meanwhile we have the Coalition to deal with and we can't afford to let them continue unopposed. They plan to complete their strangulation of our unions with more anti-union laws. Crean implies that the unions are the albatross around the neck of the ALP's government prospects. But we can more accurately say that the albatross around the necks of the working class is the pressure from the parliamentary ALP and its supporters in union leaderships. They do not propose alternatives nor campaign to stop job cuts, company collapses, anti-union laws, reduced workers' compensation entitlements, draconian conditions with the dole, subsidies to the rich for private health and private schools, while public health, education and transport are under-funded. Any serious union action to uncompromisingly challenge the Howard Government's policies will bring down the hysterical wrath of the Government, the Business Council of Australia, other employer organisations and the media. It wouldn't take long for Crean and his cronies to be applying pressure to the unions involved wherever possible in order to get us back into line. Crean wouldn't want to appear to be identified with us and so becoming a target for the wrath of such 'good Australians', and if he were PM he wouldn't grant our demands anyway.

Nationalism and racism

The fundamentals are not a great deal different since the election. A few specific issues on the agenda have been highlighted. There is no way of avoiding the issue of the racist nature of Australian nationalism. Howard's escalated attack on refugee rights from the Tampa onwards, was deliberately calculated to exploit this weakness in Australian working-class consciousness. Even the ISO tried to sidestep the issue, opposing the adoption by the Socialist Alliance of a platform position to "open the borders". Less surprisingly, the weakness is pandered to by left union officials in the AMWU promoting the idea of "fair trade not free trade", and the slogans of "make it here or jobs disappear" and "buy Australian". Yes, we want to protect our jobs, but not because our jobs are *Australian* jobs, but because we need to earn a living the same as workers or would be workers anywhere else in the world. International solidarity may not come easily, but it is essential in a globalised world. It will come a lot faster if unionists trying to defend jobs aren't sold

some form of economic nationalism instead of a bold and up-front class analysis which pins the blame for job losses on the profit motive of capital of all nationalities, and which fights for jobs by challenging the prerogative of capital, and demanding that the profiteers pay.

Solidarity gap

There is a major gap between working-class voters who feel under threat but are not in contact with any sort of working-class solidarity, and between the "progressive" sectors of the electorate who, for whatever reasons, feel able to offer solidarity with people whose needs are not necessarily their own, with refugees, with indigenous Australians, with the unemployed, with the people of Afghanistan being bombed.

The experience of working-class solidarity is the way to bridge this gap — on the ground union organising, local campaigns for jobs, services and the environment connected together with a programme for the redistribution of resources to meet the demands of these campaigns by making the profiteers pay. The Greens don't have the politics to do this. The Socialist Alliance has all sorts of obstacles to overcome to do this, but it should be able to do this work, and indeed must do this work if it is to make a serious advance in the next election.

Left unity

We need to work to overcome histories of suspicion between activists educated in the highly antagonistic traditions originating in Stalinism and Trotskyism, as well as between various far left groups — on the basis of co-operative activism and honest discussion of ideas. The Socialist Alliance project should offer hope and inspiration since it has, despite a history of differences, managed to unite a number of left groups who previously had very little dialogue, and there is more willingness to have honest discussion than has been apparent for many years. But it has so far only reached groups with Trotskyist origins.

There are socialist groups and individuals outside the Socialist Alliance, some of them in union positions, some in the ALP, who are also potentially part of a resurrection of class struggle and socialist ideas. But from both within and outside the Socialist Alliance there is the danger of some giving higher weight to historical hostilities and organisational allegiances than to the need for the left to sort out programmatic differences in a spirit of co-operation, so that we can begin to assemble a combined effort to overcome the problem of isolation of workers from class solidarity.

Finally, the debate being provoked in the ALP and the unions by Crean's New Labour ambitions is not likely to last long. While it lasts, we should take the chance to make the case for the need for a working-class party, based on recognising that working-class interests are opposed to the profit requirements of capital, and based on ultra-democracy as the means to stop workers' representatives from selling out.

Socialist Alliance, the Greens and working-class politics after the 2001 federal election

Riki Lane and Janet Burstall

The Socialist Alliance's (SA) vote of around 11,000 nationally (about the number of people who went to S11), and 1-1.4% in most House of Representative electorates (an increase on previous DSP results) is an achievement but not as good as hoped for. It is a base to build from, but there is a huge building job to be done to create a socialist organisation, a force based in the working class, that is in a position to mobilise a mass struggle for socialism.

The SA vote, considered along with the Green vote, shows where opposition to Howard and Labor is strongest. The Greens vote of around 15% in the seats of Sydney and Melbourne are the most extreme examples of strong concentration of radical opposition, contrasted to very low SA/Green votes and a stronger than average swing to the Coalition in the outer Western suburbs working-class electorates of Sydney.

The Greens' election campaign

The Greens picked up the radical vote for many reasons beyond SA influence, they have been around longer, and they have MPs with resources to campaign and gain publicity.

The Greens political approach is essentially radical, but above or beyond class and therefore inherently accepts capitalism. For example in Wills (and possibly elsewhere), the Greens basically ignored the working-class parts of the seat, and only outpolled SA 2:1 in those areas, while in the trendy Brunswick booths, they outpolled SA 12:1. They did quite well in the rich parts of the seat. Their membership is quite diverse: e.g. Gurm Sekhon in Melbourne, who recently won a council by-election, regards himself as a Marxist. Their policies on many issues are similar to those of SA (for example, NUS Queer office gave them a better mark than SA). They have excellent policies on working-class issues like 45D&E of the Workplace Relations Act, the right to strike etc, and are prominent on workers' picket lines and at left demonstrations.

The SA platform based on a good shopping list of policies (true Labor and some extras) did not adequately distinguish SA from the Greens. In the absence of a push by SA for the need for working-class representation and socialist solutions, voting Green looked a more sensible and pragmatic choice to many left voters.

The Labor vote

Labor got a low first preference vote, but the final two party preferred swing from Labor was only around 1.5%, though worse than that in some areas considered Labor heartland. This was the election that Labor should not have lost. Howard had done so many unpopular things: the GST, private school funding, subsidised private health

insurance, refusal to say 'sorry', failure to guarantee sacked workers' entitlements let alone to save jobs in a climate of mass sackings, etc. Regardless of, and well before, the Tampa and the war on terrorism, Beazley was not offering any inspirational alternative to Howard. He didn't enunciate a list of policy alternatives (but then a policy list is not inspiring) let alone an alternative perspective. It just looked as though he couldn't lose against such an unpopular government. In a sense, nothing much has changed in the terms of two-party preferred voting — Howard didn't get a landslide, Labor wasn't decimated, and Labor's policies were business as usual.

The big change in voting in this election was the number of people who didn't vote for either Labor or the Coalition. Five groups of around half a million each either didn't vote at all, voted informal, voted One Nation, voted Green or voted "other". This is a total of about 2.5million of an electorate of over 12.5 million, i.e. about one fifth. This shows a level of disenchantment or cynicism about the major parties and the political system.

This together with the national decline in the Labor vote and the loss of a third successive federal election has provoked calls from within the unions and the ALP for a reassessment of Labor's policies, direction and structure, especially the 60:40 union link and the effect of factions.

Where now for the SA?

A major challenge will be simply to maintain some of the SA branches now that the focus of the federal election is over. They need to be centres of actual organising and political discussion. This means constructively joining solidarity work with unions and working-class community campaigns and initiating street actions in anti-capitalist, anti-war and refugee support. It means having branches with a real internal life which will attract people to come to meetings. They need regular monthly meetings, discussion forums, meetings of striking workers etc. There will be state and local elections too, where the SA can run candidates, and the SA is also continuing to approach other left groups who have not yet joined the SA, for co-operation or affiliation.

The SA's overall aim in doing this must be to work to overcome isolation from working-class communities and redouble efforts to relate to organised rankandfile workers.

The SA needs to face in two directions — towards the ALP left and their working-class (especially union) base, and towards the Greens and their base in the social movements. ALP members who can be recruited to the SA can take advantage of the current promise of a re-evaluation to take up the fight inside the ALP for political

representation of the working class. The SA also needs to engage the Greens in debate and joint work. SA needs to relate to the unconvinced, to be part of the working-class movement, not just focus on building campaigns based on support for an idea or policy item, the converted, the ones who voted Green.

The SA and the Greens

The SA platform does not clearly spell out the difference between socialist and Green politics. If the SA is going to relate constructively to the Greens, especially to socialists within the Greens, then it must be clear what difference a socialist perspective would make.

The SA needs to identify the key political issues to debate with the Greens, or at least the left-wing Greens, such as: what is real democracy?; what is capitalism?; and can it save the environment?; the history of green bans and worker-community-green alliances; can the unions and the Greens co-operate?

The SA should actively seek Green participation and comment in union and working-class community solidarity campaigns and union involvement in environment protection campaigns.

An underlying issue in the election and in the anti-capitalist movement is the nature and limitations of parliamentary democracy, bourgeois democracy. It is not democratic, for many reasons that we well know. The radical vote is motivated partly by mistrust of the whole status quo. The anti-capitalist movement is united by mistrust of the process of decision-making nationally and internationally.

As socialists we have something special to bring to this concern, something which the Greens cannot bring — the idea of working-class democracy. This means: no privileges and the ability to recall elected representatives; workers' control of production; a working-class plan built from demands that are raised in workers' struggles; and democratic control of production by producers and consumers which is the only way of stopping the drive for profit from dominating our lives and destroying the environment.

The SA and the ALP

Internal divisions about the Labor Party could hamstring the SA. But the SA should relate to the reassessment in the ALP with the aim of helping to cohere Labor supporters, especially in the unions, around an analysis of the reasons for Labor's failure to represent working-class interests, and a position on what changes are needed within the whole labour movement to make it able

to represent working-class interests without deference to capital. "Factions" are being blamed, but not explained.

The two key elements are:

1. maximum democracy within the labour movement with key points being no perks and privileges, right of recall, rank and file policy debates and election of union representatives at all levels, including to ALP conferences;

2. redistributive economic policies, for union freedom, as well as for refugee and indigenous rights. Above all, the unions need a policy for jobs based on public ownership, workers' control of whole industries. But the union leaders have no policies on jobs, beyond economic nationalism and reliance on government creating favourable conditions for profit. This undermines their ability to also argue for genuinely redistributive policies.

It does matter — this upcoming reassessment in the ALP. Political struggles within the ALP and the unions have a direct bearing on the prospects for building a mass socialist organisation.

No one in the SA would even consider saying this about the Liberals — we don't even expect to recruit individuals from the Liberal Party, but we do expect to recruit them from Labor.

Socialists recognise the *collective* nature of political participation and consciousness. We want to recruit individuals from the ALP and hope to do so in significant numbers. But it is a mistake right now to urge individual ALP members to jump ship and abandon access to a political debate, however short-lived it might be. It makes more sense at this time of political reassessment in the ALP to be patient and offer political perspectives for *collective* developments in the ALP and the unions (in relation to the ALP) around agreement with key aspects of a programme for working-class struggle and socialism.

Our approach should be that we seek to recruit ALP members to SA, and encourage them to take up the fight inside the ALP for political representation of the working class. We have no bar on dual membership: let the ALP bureaucrats expel people if they dare.

Working-class orientation

Our *raison d'être* is to fight for working-class representation in politics. Our continuing work should be guided by an emphasis on class as the basis of our politics, an orientation to working-class communities, unions, and for a working-class government. This will orient us in our approaches to other forces, and ensure that the socialist politics we are fighting for are not confused with the radical politics of other groups, especially the Greens.

**Socialist
Alliance**

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How the left fared: November federal election results

Leon Parissi

There has not been much detailed analysis of the November 10 election results among the left. This election commentary from WL and others on the left puts some perspective on the approximately 11,000 House of Representative votes for the Socialist Alliance.

Of the Socialist Alliance (SA) results the best is 1.4% in Reid, a working-class electorate in Sydney. The worst SA vote was 0.3% in Page, a country seat based in Lismore and held by the conservative National Party. The average 'best' SA vote was between 1.2-1.4% in 7 electorates out of the 15 House of Representative seats contested. These figures are based on over 90% of the votes being counted. Final figures are not yet available.

With the view held by both the major SA parties (the DSP and the ISO) that 'electoralism' was to be avoided at all costs as this would 'turn off' the street militant youth a lot of time was spent building the 'Stop the War' rallies and asylum seeker support actions. Worker militants where they may have been available to contest the elections were passed over in favour of youth candidates in some cases. Only 4 out of 30 candidates admitted to being union delegates on the SA web site.

This pattern was in part a reflection of the history of the two biggest groups in the SA as activist organisations. Both the ISO and the DSP are not known for carrying out patient consistent work in unions and workplaces. Their membership reflects this. Both groups, but especially the ISO, have had a lot of trouble persuading their younger militants to work in the 'electoral' enterprise of the Socialist Alliance. This is not surprising given that street militant credibility is the mainstay of both these organisations' recruitment strategies.

Election advertising in Sydney was patchy and letter boxing not widespread. The candidates didn't spend much time talking to voters to convince them of the value of voting socialist. There have been reports of SA candidates behaving more like election organisers looking after the nuts and bolts of leafleting rather than candidates wanting to canvas for votes. A significant additional drawback to the campaign was the inability of the SA to register the name "Socialist Alliance" for the purpose of party identification on the ballot papers.

The Left and the Greens

Of the left the Newcastle result for the Progressive Labour Party at 5.0% is the high tide mark for the left and up 3.4% on the PLP result last time. But this result needs to be discounted by the 'donkey vote' factor of up to 1.0-2.0 % (according to the State Electoral Commission). Newcastle is a strong ALP seat where an anti-ALP protest vote was an easier option because the ALP were unlikely to be ousted. Also the PLP are mostly ex-CPers with a long local union and community history. Still it was a good result compared to the rest of the left. It stands out even compared to their other candidate in Robertson who got 0.4% in a marginal ALP seat where the protest vote was a more difficult choice for Labor voters. In the NSW Senate vote the PLP got 67,454 or 1.74% of the Statewide vote compared to 1,106 (0.03%) for the SA candidates. If anything this reflects the long-standing

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working-class contacts the PLP maintain even as a dying party of the old Stalinist Communist Party tradition. But perhaps there is a lesson here to be learned about building a party with working-class roots and not almost purely focused on street militants.

The Socialist Party result in Melbourne at 1.6% is disappointing when the same candidate, Steve Jolly, achieved 12% in the 1999 Victorian State election. However it is an improvement on 1.0% Jolly achieved in the Melbourne Council elections this year.

The Greens certainly attracted a Labor protest vote in the safe Labor inner city seats of Sydney and Melbourne. This first preference protest vote rose to 15% in the seat of Melbourne and 14.9% in the seat of Sydney. The more common Green vote in these sorts of electorates was 6-7% with most coming from Labor. For the Greens this amounted to a doubling of the first preference vote.

Internal ALP polling indicated that the Greens would get 15%. They achieved 13% for Grayndler (which is adjacent to Sydney). The ALP polling also predicted a "slaughter" in outer metropolitan Sydney and surrounding electorates based on a swelling tide against asylum seekers (post-Tampa). This prediction turned out to be correct. The ALP failed to win two seats from sitting Liberals which they were hopeful of winning after electoral redistributions. These seats (traditionally Labor Parramatta and Lindsay) in western Sydney, however, are also characterised by an influx of more affluent voters in recent times. These, presumably, are the so called "aspirational" voters to whom ALP figures like Mark Latham are so attracted.

So in the inner metropolitan Sydney there was a first preference swing of about 6% away from Labor to the Greens (and the Democrats to some extent) on the basis of anti-racism. A similar swing was experienced against Labor in the outer metropolitan seats as a racist influenced anti-immigrant protest vote. It will take a more detailed analysis to determine the social class composition of these swings. Gary Punch (former Labor Federal Cabinet Minister) speaking to the media claimed that three more seats would have been lost to the ALP in the Sydney outer metropolitan west if the NSW ALP premier Bob Carr had not played his own racist and anti-youth law and order card in recent years. (Punch didn't use the terms 'racist' or 'anti-youth' of course). Punch identified the mainly Anglo-Celtic seats surrounding the more migrant electorates as having the greatest rightward anti-ALP swings.

The informal vote increased to 580,362 or 4.81% up +1.04% with about the same number (582,176) not turning up to vote at all. So about 1.2 million, or 10%, out of 12.7 million registered a significant level of disinterest. A definitive comparison with the 1998 elections is not yet possible as final figures are not available.

[See the table on the next page for the latest results available at time of publication]

Federal Election Results 10 November 2001

House of Representatives (over 90% counted)

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Queensland

Brisbane 864 votes - 1.01%

New South Wales

Newcastle 354 votes - 0.44%

Page 231 votes - 0.31%

Grayndler 954 votes - 1.29%

Kingsford-Smith 558 votes - 0.73%

Lowe 267 votes - 0.36%

Reid 916 votes - 1.43%

Throsby 1,043 votes 1.36%

Australian Capital Territory

Fraser 1,369 votes 1.34%

Victoria

Wills 1,036 votes - 1.32%

Corio 698 votes - 0.89%

Gellibrand 963 votes - 1.26%

Batman 1,064 votes - 1.34%

Western Australia

Perth 568 votes - 0.77%

Fremantle 588 votes - 0.81%

Senate

Victoria 1,386 votes

Queensland 6,571 votes

NSW 1,106 votes

Tasmania 270 votes

South Australia 850 votes

Western Australia 240 votes

Northern Territory 472 votes

House of Representatives – other left parties

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

Port Adelaide 571 votes - 0.9%

SOCIALIST PARTY

Melbourne 1,054 votes - 1.6%

PROGRESSIVE LABOUR PARTY

Newcastle 3419 votes - 5.0%

Robertson 274 votes 0.4%

(PLP Senate, NSW 68,483 votes 1.7%)

COMMUNIST LEAGUE

Watson 322 - 0.46%

Source: Australian Electoral Commission

Federal election: playing the racist card wins

Melissa White looks at the recent federal election .

The Australian now ex-Minister for Defence, Peter Reith, the same individual responsible for smashing the militant Maritime Union of Australia in 1998 with the use of offshore-trained strike-breaking blacklegs, trumpeted to the Australian media in October that the citizens of Australia could not trust the claims of persecution and suffering made by the Middle Eastern "queue jumpers" pouring into Australia by the boatload every day, because these same "queue jumpers" were prepared to "throw their own children overboard" in order to "manipulate" the Royal Australian Navy into picking them up from their sinking vessels. Spurious still-footage photographs that showed nothing but a couple of dark-haired people in lifejackets in the sea were produced, but Minister Reith assured the public that the truth of his claim could be verified by the upper command of the Royal Australian Navy, and that he had it all on "good word". On the contrary, that account turned out to be mendacious falsehood and the Head of the Navy stated that there was no evidence whatever to suggest Reith's claims to be true. One moment of delight for the world-weary left in an otherwise bleak election campaign: Minister Reith was forced to tread water like the refugees he, as agent for his Party, condemns to suffering and even death.

These 'less-than-human' human beings that are the refugees Reith waves away, set the tone for a spurious and dishonest race-style election in Australia, an election in which international and domestic xenophobia fit snugly together hand-in-glove, or rather, fist-in-face. The political contest of the election was based on the course of action to be set in policy for handling the hundreds upon hundreds of people arriving on the northern-most island and reef perimeters of the Australian territories in overcrowded fishing vessels seeking refugee entry from the Middle East. The Coalition Government has proved itself incapable of addressing this issue in a humane manner from the minute it was taken totally unawares by fresh rounds of asylum-seeking people a couple of years ago. (At that time, the first boat of refugees sailed completely undetected right up onto the shore of a North Queensland beach and wandered, dazed and half-starved, into the local Cairns newsagency to use the telephone.)

The Liberal and Labor parties outdid each other to run campaigns on "security at home and abroad" in the last six weeks of the election campaign, refugees the crucible for the pitiful contestants. Who could be most stern in "taking a stand" for the national interest of Australia? Who could be the better racist patriot? Who, in fact, could pander more basely to the unfortunate racism of the Australian working classes? Howard and his Coalition government won the contest, but not for want of trying by the ALP. The Government was re-elected for its third term on November 10, and Australian socialists feel as our British counterparts must have felt under the seemingly indestructible Thatcher: at our wits' end. Running on this "security" agenda, the Government that looked utterly woe-begone only a few months earlier on the strength of

petit bourgeois hatred of the new taxation regime, made a miraculous comeback from political death, succeeding in unifying the fractious right vote, succeeding in splitting the working class and left-leaning liberal vote along a different fault-line. The now overt xenophobia of the Government succeeded, finally, in decimating the vote for the far-right populist parties such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party and its various splinter groups. The vote for these candidates was almost totally absorbed by the Government.

This same Government has been illiberal in its definition of 'refugee status', and none more brutal in its detention of refugees. The pre-emptive arrests of people resulting in their immediate and indefinite detention effectively undermine the fundamental principle of common law: guilty until proven innocent. The civil rights of such people are thus suspended, and this is a social regression of a serious order. For refugees, the very fact of "unauthorised" entry is determined to override the actual reasons for entry, and detention is the automatic consequence. During those long months and years whilst applications for refugee status are processed, the refugees are kept in virtual concentration camps, some in the Australian desert.

Apart from making a virtue of the political "courage" of its policy on refugees the centrepiece of the Australian election campaign (so very brave ringing up the SAS from an air-conditioned office in Canberra...), there was little else on offer from the Government except "continued sound economic management", and nothing whatever, not one skerrick, on offer for the improvement of life for the Australian working class. The deregulation, the union busting, the degradation of social services, the GST — all set to continue. It was possible to 'stand in the same river twice' in the paranoid climate of this election campaign since most of the people seeking refuge in Australia are from the Middle East the terrorist attacks of September 11 that occurred in the USA worked initially as a sickening and massive boost to Howard's campaign. This allowed Howard to link border protection with the threat of entry into Australia of Muslim fundamentalist terrorists. In fact, the last link in the chain was made a week before polling day, when, despite the established fact that most refugees coming to Australia are escaping fundamentalist persecution (and now, indeed, war), the Coalition Government advertised publicly that unless it had free hand to control the refugees in the way their policies outlined, it could not control terrorism. This ideological standover tactic by the Government finally succeeded in scaring — or appealing to — a section of a working class, quite obviously genuinely disaffected with Howard, but unprepared to move against the incumbent exploiting basic human vulnerabilities and when a Labor Government would come to power on very minor political commitments and then — at best — make indiscernible improvements in the conditions of working-class life and willingly oversee increasing working-class disenfranchisement.

Minor, indiscernible — because the Opposition Labor Party had really done little better. On the issue of refugees again, rather than commit funds to even more barbaric methods of detention as a supposed deterrent for people wanting to flee the Middle East as the Coalition proposed to do in its so-called "Pacific Solution" (outlined below),

Labor wanted to commit funds to an improved coastal patrol guard. Apart from the ludicrous nature of this proposal — there is little chance of patrolling the coast of the largest island continent, with a coastline bounding seven and a half million square kilometres of land, testimony to the total failure of Australian federal police to control Asian and South American drug importation — it is but a variant of the Coalition's policy. Instead of locking up refugees, the Labor Party proposed to aim guns at them in advance, in a bid to force them to turn back before they got too close. Vacillating at times in its support for the Government's actions, the ALP decided finally in its election policies that this policy, at least electorally, was safe, since it was already tested and found popular: after all, the Ministers for Defence and Immigration had directed the SAS to crack-reconnoitre the Norwegian shipping vessel 'Tampa' that had picked up some 400 people whose boat was about to sink and then illegally entered Australian territory — and deny that boat entry. This was immensely popular in the Australian electorate. However, whilst this posture was so vastly popular, the Government still had to decide what to do about the people on the boat. A week passed by whilst the Government hawked around the governments of the Melanesian and Micronesian islands to find a willing recipient for the human cargo — Australia was "putting its foot down", like a jackboot to the skull. Eventually Nauru agreed to take these refugees — fully funded by the Australian Government — most of whom refused to budge for one month initially when they arrived in Nauru. The refugee "ringleaders" were eventually manhandled off the ship, and the resistance of the people on board, worn threadbare by weeks on the high seas and weeks waiting whilst all governments prevaricated, eventually disembarked onto their new island home.

This failure of the ALP to distinguish itself politically from the Government in relation to refugees has now resulted in the alienation of its Labor left support base, which has seemingly defected to the Greens. (In the ALP safe seats of Sydney and Melbourne, the Greens' primary vote was an unbelievable 15%.) There are of course other contributing factors for this changing composition in the vote, but we cannot over emphasise the centrality of the refugee issue this November past. The fact of the alienation of the left of the ALP will have one of two consequences. Either it will pave the way for the ALP to more easily sever its links with the unions, as Blair has done in the Labour Party in Britain since the electoral failure will provide stimulation for a general party shake-up. This will not be an easy fight for Labor's right factions. The unions make up 60% of delegates at ALP state branch conferences (the highest policy making body within ALP structure), and the right will have a bloody political purge on its hand if it chooses this option. Alternatively, factional life within the ALP will be re-invigorated for the better. The federal ALP has been completely dominated by the right factions since the 1970's, but the kind of arguments that can be made with sharpened emphasis after the election could now include the role of the rank and file in policy formation and political life within the ALP.

The Socialist Alliance made its foray into electoral politics in this grim setting. Visible on some anti-war demonstrations in the capital cities in October and November, it campaigned to "open the borders". The

Australian Socialist Alliance, unlike the uneasy alliance inside the British Socialist Alliance, is a too-easy alliance, although, like the British Socialist Alliance experience, there have been several unseemly political incidents, mostly in relation to the different preferencing policies decided upon in the different branches of the Alliance. The Socialist Alliance ran in just 15 of the 148 electorates for the House of Representatives spread over 4 states (Qld, Vic, NSW, WA) and 1 territory (ACT), with the majority contesting in NSW and Victoria. Socialist Alliance preferencing policy across those electorates in which it was standing candidates varied widely, a result of the bizarre regionalism regarding tactical matters that has now come to dominate over any centralised SA authority. The Socialist Alliance also ran candidates for the Senate in all 6 states and 1 territory (NT).

The result was disappointing, and actually embarrassingly low — just over 1% on average. Some of this can be attributed to outright handicap (the name "Socialist Alliance" was not registered on the ballot paper in time). The rest can be attributed to factors that Workers' Liberty has criticised publicly since the inception of the SA idea: the impotent policies, the aloof campaigning methods, the conscious refusal of an open political broadsheet for the general public, representative of the different political current within the Alliance.

These problems stand. We should, however, re-commit ourselves to the project of Socialist Alliance. The unity drive the Left is currently involved in Australia should now be given form and content if political agreement and revolutionary unanimity of aim is to take the constituent

groups involved past the shallow agreement that united the group electorally around a few uncontroversial platform bullet points. We should demand of each other answers to certain critical questions. For example, why was the SA not able to take any of that massive increase in the Greens vote? The Greens and the Socialist Alliance are now the only political parties committed to stop the war and to settle the refugees (and the Socialist Alliance the only party more definably committed to a few pro-working-class policies). However, the Greens benefited almost exclusively from the diminished support for the Coalition and Labor, and the Socialist Alliance did not. If anything, the work of the SA has simply doubled. Not only must the SA seek to put out the public arguments about the rightful role of trade union influence on the policies of the ALP, but it now urgently needs to approach the Greens to influence them 'classwards'. If an alliance with the Greens could be forged that was not at the expense of the class analysis, the Alliance may have some chance of survival. It would be false to assume there is more that unites the SA politically with the Greens than divides it. But along political lines of the need to create a civilisation worth living in, and on the topic of the need to secure the conscious agreement of ordinary people across the world before that can occur, we are united in one common cause. This fact should be exploited with the following caveat: it will always fall to the socialists to devise the concrete methods of class politics which will bring about a world in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilisation, a world without borders or frontiers, social classes or leaders and a world in which production is at last freed from the artificial constraints of profit and used for the good of humanity — socialism.

Council Elections and Socialist Alliance

Riki Lane

The SA runs in local elections for the same reason we run anywhere — to make a stand for working-class political representation.

We need to distinguish ourselves clearly from the Greens and from Labor. The way to do this is to provide clear and concrete pro-worker, anti-capitalist and socialist answers to the problems working people face.

Examples of this are to: support council workers' claims for shorter hours, better conditions and wages; oppose contracting out and support taking back work previously contracted out; support proper staffing and resourcing levels. We want to improve services — this requires properly staffed and paid workers.

We want improved public services — transport, electricity, gas etc. This means opposing their privatisation or arguing for their re-nationalisation. SA elected representatives would commit themselves to standing up to state and federal governments to get adequate funding.

We also need to relate to the Greens and their leftish base, and to the ALP and its working-class and trade union base. We need to talk to the Greens about collaboration, both electorally and in activism. We should not assume that we will necessarily preference Greens ahead of the ALP — this will depend on each case.

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In Wills, for example, we could support the Greens in Hoffman ward, where the ALP candidate, Joe Caputo, has a terrible record locally, but support the ALP in Merri ward, where Tony Helou has taken a good position on many issues and is actively supporting the anti-war movement.

How we approach this is on the basis of what is best for the working-class voters in the area. We look for commitments, publicly, from ALP and Greens on what they will do for workers if elected — what attitude they will take to council workers' strikes etc. It is quite possible that our preferences could decide the outcome in some cases, which gives us leverage to engage both parties in serious debate about class issues.

We need to get to know the local union organisers — make SA the first point of call when they want support for a picket line. We should seek out the possibilities for unions to sponsor candidates themselves and for good ALP left activists to run against right-wing machine candidates.

There are possibilities for broader electoral coalitions, with Greens, unionists, non SA left groups etc. We need to stress the need for class politics to be up front in these campaigns. This means the sort of issues outlined above and antiwar and pro-refugee issues.

Minor parties tend to get better results in local elections than general ones, as people know that the "fate of the nation" is not at stake. This is born out in recent Melbourne results. It

represents an opportunity to make socialist politics concretely relevant to our class, instead of being abstract propaganda.

The flip side of course is the danger of becoming mired in "municipal reformism".

Join Workers' Liberty

Join the fight to build a class struggle left-wing in the labour movement!

Join Workers' Liberty

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www.workersliberty.org/australia

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FORUM

Post-election round-up

Liz Macnamara Interviewed Klaas Woldring of the Progressive Labour Party

How can the left re-group after the 10 November election results?

You mean outside of the ALP?

Yes.

Well, first of all we have to talk together, of course. And the other thing is we have to get the unions to understand that they have to support the left outside the ALP. Unfortunately, I have to say, that is not happening. They are wedded to the ALP, and however they make their decisions, they have to see there are parties outside the parliamentary arena that are deserving of support and who come up with candidates with quality.

Now, I am an associate professor, I've been co-founder of this party, and I feel absolutely ashamed that I am supporting a major union in Australia and they can't get a cent to our campaign. I have to complained to them, but you know, this is all after the decision.

So, that's another thing we should do – make the unions aware of parties of the left that are deserving of support.

Now, the other thing is that I think, we really, we ought to move to a coalition, a formal coalition of Green Left. The Greens have, sort of, adopted the attitude that they don't want to associate themselves formally with another party, but I think this is a little bit passé. Of course we want a name 'Green' in there, but we have to have a formal alliance, an alliance that can, you know, muster a third of the vote in the next election.

The other point I'd like to make is, I think it is quite conceivable that there's going to be a double dissolution halfway in the year, and I urge the Greens and the Democrats – especially the Democrats of course, who up to this point have a policy of not blocking the budget — to change that policy and to block the budget in May, because I don't think the outcome of the election reflects the true feelings of the Australian party. And when people get to know more and more about the refugee crisis, and how absolutely racist and idiotic the decision of Howard has been, I think they'll say, "we have been deceived". And it would be very good if we had another election halfway in the year, and it can only be achieved by blocking the budget.

You were talking about a new Green Left alliance – a wish list for groups you'd like to see in that?

Well, it can be as broad as possible. They have to agree on a common policy, that's the only thing. In my own view the Socialist Alliance can be part of that. There are some people in our party who sort of fear the Socialist Alliance a little bit because there are ideological differences. I have personally never had a problem with that, but nevertheless I think that can be overcome.

So there are already three groups that could be part of that. The Democrats could also be part of that if they shifted to the left; they could be part of it if they so decide. But there have to be talks, you know, for a new front, because new vision is not coming from the ALP. Don't bank on it, it won't come.

[Election forum continued on next page]

Howard's re-election is Labor's crisis: socialists need to drive agenda for transition

Wayne Sonter, unionist & activist,

Howard's agenda for workers' organisation after the ruthless victory of 10 November 2001 is to:-

- Direct attacks aimed at dismantling trade unions, destroying workers' ability to organise and loss of labour and human rights;
- Dismember the ALP by 'hauling it over the coals of its constituencies' as government shifts the political balance rightwards;
- Isolate Australia's popular masses from 'internationalised norms of civilised behaviour' as the government seems to balance the local economy without reference to global shifts.
- Continue to dismantle the public sector economy, social welfare nets and equity through government services, while building coercive social, institutional controls.

At the same time he will inextricably tie the Australian state to imperialism and slavishly endorse the US "war against terrorism" which will pick up all other wars and counter-insurgency operations that defend 'the empire'. All this will require extra police and surveillance powers and shift of resources into weaponry rather than civic amenity.

This is a crisis and an opportunity for those who seek to realize a global 'socio-enviro-economy' based on 'justice and sustainability not exploitation and inequality':

The labour movement is very vulnerable as its old nets of organisation dissolve; but it is necessary for its growth and transformation. Workers are more open to new vanguard forces in more desperate times – they can accept not only 'reform through recession', but revolutionary solutions to a generalizing crisis, if these are what make the most sense.

Those who seek or claim to lead the socially progressive forces centred on the working class have a role and responsibility to understand and explain the current dynamic of forces and mobilize – spearhead – appropriate action that can effectively take on the capitalist class world wide, as well as 'locally'.

At the core of labour's emancipation is working people's capacity to act collectively to build a self-managing, co-operative world economy; and at the core of this is our ability to regulate most evenly the work-time society needs to re-create itself, in a way 'most rational and worthy of our human nature'.

Enlightened labour laws strengthen labour's hand! We urgently need to build labour's rights and powers to organise. We need to build membership and militancy in unions. We need to be developing a positive vision for the future and key strategic actions. Labour must take up a world-wide campaign to set world standards for progressive work-time practice — as a centerpiece of a socialist strategy that enables labour to most

directly unite through full employment and pull society out of a growing economic, social, political crisis!

For a start we should take up north European left-unionists' calls to make a 6-hour working day a mobilizing objective for the international labour movement in the first decades of the 21st century. Help get labour on the front foot!

Paul Conway gives an anarcho-syndicalist view of the election results

The following comment was originally sent as a response to the WL post-election article (see page 4) on our public email list — Ed.

The great geographical divergence between the inner cities and the outer suburbs was widely remarked on in the media on election night and in the immediate aftermath. Unaddressed, it is a source of great danger for the Left, since the trends are pretty bad out there and the Right has the field almost to itself. As you say, it is the specifically socialist arguments which will be the attraction in these areas, not the causes of the social movements. In the inner cities, the Left needs to bring a lot of people around from petit bourgeois radicalism to working-class politics, while in the outer suburbs, the left needs to use class politics to break people from right-wing social attitudes.

The great jump in the informal vote, coming on top of a long term trend towards an increase in voting informally, is something many will underestimate. At bottom, it is an expression of hostility to the existing political order. While I have not yet had the opportunity to analyse the geographic distribution of the informal vote in this election, past elections have demonstrated that the greatest informal vote is registered in the strongest working-class electorates. Since this is most probably a response to the drift of the ALP to the right and the growing consensus around economic rationalism in mainstream politics, the informal vote is an indication that the hostility to the existing order has the potential to evolve in a revolutionary working-class direction. The word "potential" is crucial here, since if the Left doesn't come up with a credible alternative, there's no shortage of rightist snake oil salespersons with miracle cures to peddle.

The dishonest and opportunist nature of the current push to reduce union influence in the ALP needs to be brought out. While the Liberals can be expected to use any excuse for union-bashing that is available, the prominence of a number of ALP politicians, not least the recently elected leader of the parliamentary party, is significant. In the last few years, the unions have been totally subservient to the politicians when it comes to policy or political strategy, so whatever blame for Labor's defeat can be attributed to these features lies squarely at the feet of those politicians. Further, the forces arguing for the reduction of union influence in the ALP are precisely those responsible for the corrosive ascendancy of economic rationalism and the subsequent destruction of the membership base. These people have a Blairite agenda and want total control of the Party so as to facilitate its transformation into the equivalent of the US Democrats.

The question of the SA branches is crucial. If SA is to be a worthwhile project, it needs to be a force within the working class in its campaigns on the ground. If SA branches collapse because there is no election campaign to fight, it would be a great victory for electoralism and a setback for the revolutionary left. It would be a demonstration that politics in Australia have regressed greatly and that the current optimism on the left is misconceived.

On the Greens, the [WL post election – ed.] statement seems to be advocating a course which would lead to splitting the Greens and fusing with their left wing: "1.. We need to develop a relationship with the Greens, to draw the Marxists and socialists, and supporters of class struggle in the Greens to work with us to develop common perspectives and agreement, that could lay the basis for future regroupment of forces." Is this correct? If so, it looks to me like a definite change in the WL perspective.

To conclude, I think you're right to emphasise the strategy of working-class democracy. I think, however, there is a degree of tension between this and an orientation towards the Greens. The real battle is going to be in the outer suburbs of the cities and our enemies will be the Neil Mitchells and Alan Jones of this society. In this, the Greens will be pretty marginal — either as allies or as opponents.

Stop corporate globalisation union rally, Sydney 13.11.01

“Why I am protesting”

Liz Macnamara

On November 13, 2001, a meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Qatar was not stopped by a demonstration of 2000 people in Sydney organised by the International Metal Workers Federation. It was not stopped by similar demonstrations in other cities around the world. A couple of minor concessions were allowed by the gathered representatives of world capitalism — the International Labour Organisation's core labour standards were tabled, and that body's work on the social dimension of globalisation was noted.

However, the devastating effects of trade liberalisation on hundreds of millions of workers was not noted; no plans were made to acknowledge or deal with the human suffering caused by corporate globalisation. Around the world people marched, waved placards, shouted protests, while, unruffled in Qatar, tunnel-visioned powerbrokers in well-cut suits played a dangerous game of footsy under tablecloths woven with blood.

[The following vox pops interviews are published as they were recorded. Readers may find it interesting to compare the wide spectrum of opinion voiced in support of the 'anti-corporate' mobilisation. The participants do not necessarily reflect the politics of Workers' Liberty – Ed.]

“Wake up! This country needs a shake up!” Sing it. Shout it! Scream it till you're hoarse. What *is* the point?

Three days after John Howard's re-election with an increased majority. What *is* the point?

First march, last march, one of a blur. What *is* the point?

Why did you come out to march today?

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Carl, Resistance and Socialist Alliance: I came from school actually, got off early, yeah. I just feel really strongly about globalisation — it's really screwing up the world — and I'm just here to voice my protest.

James, ACT, Young Labor Left: Corporate globalisation has been so detrimental to the entire world... It is pretty much the entire epiphany of my beliefs at this point and it's really strong to see so many people supportive of your beliefs.

Elisha, Quakers: I really support fair trade and a decent deal for people in disadvantaged countries and even in this country who aren't getting a good deal.

Margaret, Community Aid Abroad: I'm protesting against the World Trade Authority's inability to provide for all in the world — both first and third world.

Scott, AMWU: To demonstrate to John Howard that unions rule and we won't accept any crap he gives out.

Rae and Marianne, Sydney University: To let little John Howard see that not everyone agrees with his racist, capitalist shit.

Doreen, Wollongong, involved with the Retired Wharfies and the Peace Movement: I think it's important — you've got to be on the street, you've got to be visible.

Mick, Newcastle, AWU: Join me mates in the rally against these greedy mongrels.

Are you anti-globalisation or anti-capitalist?

Peter, Now We the People Movement: Anti-capitalist — capitalism is totally unjust, it's tearing the world apart, tearing Australia apart, so we have to build the alliance and the ideas to change it.

Geoff, FSU, Anti-capitalist — I think Marx was right when he talked about the exploitation process of the working classes.

Elisha: I wouldn't really describe myself as either — I'm really for justice and for peace.

Margaret: Anti-globalisation. Interjection from **Debbie**, fellow Community Aid Abroad worker: We have to change it so it's fair for all workers.

Margaret, Politics in the Pub and Now We the People: Anti-globalist — I think capitalism, well, I'm not anti- either really, both are happening but they've got to be within a moral framework.

Warren, CPA. Both, it's part of the same thing. Globalisation is at present a tool of the big corporations and the capitalist ruling class. Look, you've got 6.2 billion people in the world today and 4 billion of them are poor. You've got starving people all around the globe, that's one of the reasons and there is a host of others. Look at the massive retrenchments and unemployment we're seeing, that's only going to get worse. We're seeing poverty developing now at an amazing rate even in the most developed countries — the whole planet is being split into the rich and the poor and each country is being split into the rich and the poor, more and more so.

James: Anti-both — what we really want is in retaliation to what we see as corporate globalisation is a globalised union movement to ensure that, as we have been saying, fair trade rather than free trade. We recognise that global movements can be a good thing so that in that sense we are anti-capitalist as well.

Carl: Anti-both — I think anti-globalisation is more general and we need to build on that before we look at anti-capitalist alternatives.

Pat, Progressive Labor Party: Anti-globalisation first, because, while I would have socialist philosophy and aim, the immediate thing is not just to say you're anti-capitalist, because you're not going to begin to bring enough people into the process of being opposed to corporate globalisation. To say you're anti-capitalist means you're not going to be able to persuade people, though I would agree that greedy capitalism is at the roots of corporate globalisation.

What can be achieved by today's march?

Geoff: A renewal of the progressive movements in Australia, so that we understand the struggle is industrial, it's political, it's environmental. I'd like to see us build on it and just keep going.

Doreen: I'd like to see it encourage more people to demonstrate against what's happening to other areas of the world as well as their own and to build on that and have a really united movement amongst the trade unions.

Margaret: Community Aid Abroad: I think for people who would not be aware that the WTO is meeting at the moment — that they are educated into that. And also to see so many people are objecting to the fact that some corporations are not looking at the impact of their decisions further on down the line for their workers

Elisha: Hopefully some sort of media coverage and just getting the message across to other people who perhaps aren't aware of the disadvantages of globalisation.

James: Bring out the issues within the community. A lot of people who are undecided about it, or even fairly certain on it, just to recognise that there are a lot of people who feel this way and are willing to do something about it.

Pat: I hope more and more it's going to have the effect on working people of (seeing) the importance of the strength of unionism, because with this Government being returned to power there are going to be more attacks on unions, and, of course — as far as fair trade not free trade — you have to look at workers' rights here in Australia. We don't want industries to go off shore; we also don't want people in the third world to be exploited.

Margaret: Politics in the Pub and Now We the People: Precious little, but what one can do is present your polity and wave your banner and hope that maybe bystanders will perhaps think a little more about things, and sending messages. I mean, what more *can* you do at a grass roots level than stand up and be counted?

Mick: You just have to do it, 'cause it's your right and you can't just lay down and take it — they'll walk on you.

International

The Threat of the Northern Alliance

Clive Bradley

The Northern Alliance, or United Front, is essentially the people who ran Afghanistan between the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1989 and the Taliban's seizure of power in 1996. Burhannadin Rabbani, who is currently establishing his power in Kabul, was president from 1992 — and was meant to withdraw in favour of another tribal leader according to a previous agreement, but refused to do so. Rabbani, the official head of the Northern Alliance, is an Islamic fundamentalist, though somewhat less extremist than the Taliban. An ethnic Tajik, he is former lecturer in Islamic law at Kabul university.

The Northern Alliance, as its name suggests, is a coalition of forces based to the north of the Taliban (former) stronghold, the Pashtun south of the country around Kandahar. Each of the components of the Alliance has a largely tribal/ethnic base, rather than a political or ideological one. These are all "parties" which were forged in the struggle against Russian occupation in the 1980s.

The main groups are:

The ethnic Tajik Jamiat-e-Islami, led by General Hohammed Fahim Khan. Khan's predecessor, Ahmed Shah Masood, was an extremely popular leader, murdered by the Taliban a few days before the attacks on New York. In the west central and heart provinces, Ismael Khan, a former member of Jamiat-e-Islami, is also key.

The second main grouping is the ethnic Uzbek Junbish-e-Milli-yi Islami, led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum. Dostum previously opposed Masood, but joined the Northern Alliance this year. Then there are the ethnic Hazara shi'a groupings, which are very close to the Iranian government, Hizbi-Whadat led by Karim Khalili and Mohaqiq.

A Pashtun group, Hizb-e-Islami, led by the notorious Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, joined the Northern Alliance this year. The various factions of the Northern Alliance have a long history of war between each other. In the two years after the fall of the Moscow-backed Najibullah government in 1994, some 60,000 people died. Dostum and Hekmatyatar, hitherto bitter enemies, attempted a coup against Rabbani in 1994, which failed. Dostum had previously been an ally of Masood; in the years after the Taliban seized power, the different factions of the Alliance have shifted between opposing and uniting with each other. It seems unlikely they will be able to hold together indefinitely now they have the Taliban on the retreat. The Northern Alliance has been backed by Iran, Russia, and India. Pakistan has always opposed them (being significantly responsible for the Taliban), and so has reacted with some concern at the Alliance's military successes.

Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign launched

Socialist Alliance

The Australian labour movement has a proud history of solidarity with workers in struggle, in Australia and internationally. Right now, workers in Afghanistan need practical support for their very existence. They have suffered under decades of war by religious fundamentalists, followed by years of drought and the current US military campaign.

The Socialist Alliance asks all unions and community organisations and activists to consider giving support to the Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign launched by the Labour Party of Pakistan. A copy of their appeal for support follows.

Conditions for workers in Pakistan and Afghanistan are atrocious. This campaign is an opportunity to build up the forces of the labour movement in this region and to help save workers from death through starvation and cold.

SA is co-ordinating this appeal in Australia. As outlined in the appeal, there are a number of ways you can give support.

LPP and ALRO launch appeal

Labour Party Pakistan in close association with Afghan Labour Revolutionary Organisation has decided to launch the Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign. The idea to start this campaign was discussed during the visit of Alan Macomb of the Scottish Socialist Party. The SSP has already decided to actively support this campaign.

LPP and ALRO are appealing to all the international left and trade union movement to support this campaign.

The main aim of this campaign is to help the Afghan workers in their struggle to survive. It will bring material help for the Afghan workers which will be distributed inside Afghanistan and also in refugee camps in Pakistan. It will help to strengthen the progressive organisations of the Afghan workers. It will collect and bring every day life necessities to the Afghan workers on an emergency basis.

Comradely,
Shoaib Bhatti

Organizer, Afghan Workers Solidarity

Affiliate directly to the campaign (\$US 300 for organisations, US\$100 for individuals) to the account below. You can also donate directly to that fund in \$US.

Please send your donations to following bank account:

Education Foundation Donation

Account number 01 7967128

Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank, Gulberg Branch

Main Boulevard, Gulberg Lahore Pakistan

This is a \$US account.

Alternatively, donate to the fund that Socialist Alliance is collecting for the AWSC. Cheques (in \$AUD) can be made out to AWSC and sent to P.O. Box A2323 1235 Sydney South.

If you want more information, please contact Riki Lane on 03 93877819 or 0400877819.

America wants a base in Afghanistan

Adel, Afghan Revolutionary Labour Organisation

America has a long-term plan in the area. It also wants to teach a lesson to the Northern Alliance — that without the American support they can neither conquer Afghanistan nor maintain it. America also wants a strong base in Afghanistan to keep a check on China and Russia.

Even if the Taliban are not fully defeated, a faction of them, under foreign pressure, can join the new set-up. While another faction with the support of Al Quaida will join a guerrilla war. In the future, a broad-based government comprising moderate Taliban and Pashtuns is possible. There is no question of stable and long-lasting government. The enforced set-up, with or without Zahir Shah, will look after the interests of America, not the interests of Afghan people. If the expectations of the Afghan tribes are not fulfilled they can opt for civil war. The poppy production can also become a focal point for conflict between America and local tribal leaders.

The future government will not be able to solve a single problem for the Afghan masses nor it will be a representative government. This will be a dependent government, which will not be strong or able to maintain peace. This government will only defend the American interest and these interests are profit from the export of oil. The strongest possibility is that it will pass through

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Pakistan but the profit will go in the pockets of Americans. Pakistan wants to become a gateway to central Asia. The ARLO does not support any imposed set-up in Afghanistan. This new set up will defend American interests. The problem of Afghan people will not be solved by them neither it is their agenda. Former King Zahir Shah's talk of election and transitional government is a deception. Because of ignorance and the history of mass murder, Afghans may consider Zahir Shah as an alternative but they will come out of this illusion very soon.

Since 1964, our party has opposed Zahir Shah. His and other governments have killed hundreds of our party comrades. We cannot set aside or forget our party martyrs. We will do our best to expose this fraud and we will strengthen the class movement to establish a genuine government of Afghan masses. Several groups are supporting Zahir Shah, considering him the lesser evil, this will be a big mistake. Our party cannot afford that. We are fighting a dual war and we are hopeful that the victory will be of poor Afghan masses.



The Fall of Kabul

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)

The people of the world need to know the "Northern Alliance" criminals. These are the very people who declared democracy and elections to be blasphemous, heretical concepts. These are the very people who immediately, upon usurping power after the bursting of the bubble of the puppet Najib regime, and prior to any vitally pressing action in regard to the restoration of peace and well-being of the scourged people of Afghanistan, targeted their pious wrath against women and in a joint declaration of all allied jihadi parties proclaimed — amongst other sordid restrictions — the compulsory veiling of all women. The people of the world need to know that long before the Taliban, it was Mr. Mullah Younis Khalis (a confederate of the victorious jihadis) who "executed" the Buddha statues at Bamiyan by firing volleys of artillery against it. The people of the world need to know that in terms of widespread raping of girls and women from ages seven to seventy, the track record of the Taliban can in no way stand up against that of these very same "Northern Alliance" associates. The people of the world need to know that with their track record of numerous massacres, looting national assets and archaeological riches, extorting vast amounts of money from defenceless people and perpetrating other crimes and atrocities too numerous to list here, the leaders of the "Northern Alliance" only deserve to sit in the dock in international tribunals beside other war criminals, and not at the helm of a government for Afghanistan.

RAWA once again serves warning to the United Nations and the world community that any delay in despatching UN peace keeping forces to Afghanistan will in effect be leaving the way

open for inevitable bloodbaths and repetition of the unparalleled horrors and atrocities of the 1992-96 years. The current dog-fighting between Dostum and Hezb-i-Wahdat gangs will not remain restricted to Mazar-i-Sharif. If the United Nations is sincerely concerned in regard to the independence, unity and democratisation of Afghanistan it must under no name or pretext continue its support to the "Northern Alliance" and swiftly and unequivocally condemn and punish any country which tries to supply funds and arms to these murderers. It will only be then that a government devoid of terrorist-fundamentalist contamination and based on democratic values can be set up in Afghanistan, succeed in restoring peace and stability to this blighted land and address the challenge of its rehabilitation in earnest.

The mere end of the forced misery and humiliation of the burqa is in no way an indication of attainment of women's rights and liberties. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, as the only feminist anti-fundamentalist organisation in Afghanistan, believes that only with the establishment of a secular and democratic government in Afghanistan will Afghan women be able to unburden the deadweight of centuries of oppression and stand their full stature on a par with men.

Our devastated motherland, draped in unending mourning, escaped the talons of Taliban criminality only to find itself in the dead-end of jihadi murderers; a "dead-end" which eludes description and definition, except perhaps in the potent and glorious words of Ahmad Shamlu. But RAWA, together with the

Afghan people who bore it, will never desist from struggling to break out of this "dead-end": [abridged for space – Ed]

In This Deadend

They smell your breath.
You better not have said, "I love you." They smell your heart.
These are strange times, darling...
And they flog
Love
at the roadblock.
We had better hide love in the closet...
In this crooked dead end and twisting chill, they feed the fire
with the kindling of song and poetry.
Do not risk a thought.
These are strange times, darling...
He who knocks on the door at midnight
has come to kill the light.
We had better hide light in the closet...
Those there are butchers
stationed at the crossroads
with bloody clubs and cleavers.
These are strange times, darling...
And they excise smiles from lips
and songs from mouths.
We had better hide joy in the closet...
Canaries barbecued
on a fire of lilies and jasmine,
These are strange times, darling...
Satan drunk with victory
sits at our funeral feast.
We had better hide God in the closet.

Ahmad Shamlu

Israel/Palestine on brink of war

Colin Foster

Israel is on the brink of full-scale war. When a dissident Palestinian group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, shot dead Israel's tourism minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, and the Israeli government immediately responded by invading areas of the West Bank which are supposed to be ceded to Palestinian control. The Israeli forces are still occupying Palestinian Authority areas, and further invasions are taking place, despite repeated calls from the US government for Israel to withdraw. The latest bloodshed brings the total killed in the last year, since peace talks broke down and the "second intifada" erupted, to 698 Palestinians and 178 Israelis. A measure of how bad things are is that Israeli peace groups — including Gush Shalom, the Alternative Information Centre, and *Workers' Liberty* No. 21 Summer 2001/02

the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace — have been reduced to sending a letter to US Secretary of State Colin Powell "urgently requesting your intervention". According to some press reports, the Israeli government has sent a message to Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat saying that unless he finds and arrests Ze'evi's killers, and suppresses the PFLP, Israel will deal with the Palestinian Authority "in the same way that the US is now dealing with the Taliban". Even more ominously, Sharon has promised to carry out Ze'evi's "last will and testament".

Ze'evi was on the chauvinist far right of Israeli politics. His solution to the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was to expel all the Arabs, both from Israel and from the territories occupied in 1967. That he had got to be a government minister is a symptom of how rapidly Israeli politics has been spiralling away from any real search for peace with the Palestinians. According to the liberal Israeli daily Ha'aretz, "no-one really believes Israel's prime minister will actually implement an ideology" of mass expulsions. Ha'aretz reckons that Sharon has another plan — less drastic, but equally certain to lead to continued injustice, misery, and conflict. "The first stage would be the creation of a [Palestinian] state that would consist of cantons, would be surrounded by Jewish settlements, would not have any real sovereignty and would not exercise any control over the location of its external borders or over its airspace. The second stage would be implemented 20 years later: if Israel is pleased with their behaviour, it will offer the Palestinians a state that would be contained within the enclaves left to them by the Jewish settlers".

This scheme is much more like apartheid South Africa's "bantustans" than a real independent state for the Palestinians. It would be combined with a renewed drive for Jewish settlements, under Israeli army protection, in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the latest figures from the Israeli "Peace Now" movement, more new settlements were started in 2000 (4,499 housing units started) than in any year since 1992. When the Oslo agreement was signed in 1993, there were 32,750 housing units in Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Since then another 20,371 have been constructed. And, in order to shield Israel from the effects of the boiling anger that would be cooped up in those Palestinian cantons, it is likely that Sharon would surround them with heavy border walls and fences, opened up mainly in order for Israeli troops to come in to try to crush the more militant Palestinian movements. Sharon's iron fist is unlikely to quell the fundamentalist Hamas, or the secular militant-nationalist groups like the PFLP. On the contrary. PLO leader Yasser Arafat is trying to reopen the slammed-shut door of peace by way of trading support for the USA in its war on Afghanistan for US pressure on Israel to make concessions. His calculations are not without foundation. The USA is very concerned to keep Arab and Muslim states on side, and therefore to be seen as sympathetic to the Palestinians. George W Bush has come out more explicitly than before for an independent Palestinian state.

The USA's will and ability to turn Israel round remain small, however. The Israeli government says it is confident that the USA will not even reduce or delay its financial aid to Israel. And Sharon has a built-in interest in "toughing it out" and trying to drive a wedge between the USA and its Arab allies. Arafat is increasingly out of tune with the population in the occupied territories. "Arafat's opposition — made up of the Islamic bloc and the left — now enjoys the majority of the support of the Palestinian public" (Ha'aretz, 20 October), and much of Arafat's

own group, Fatah, leans towards the Islamists. Here, unfortunately, for now, "the left" does not signify a socialist alternative to Arafat. Groups like the PFLP have increasingly become tail-ends of Islamist groups like Hamas, which are militant in wanting to destroy the Jews rather than follow any democratic or class-struggle way. The days are long past when a left-wing secular-nationalist group, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, could be a pioneer in Palestinian politics in recognising the existence of the Israeli Jews as a nation with rights, not just as "the Zionists".

The grievance voiced by Hamas, and by the ultra-nationalists, that the Jewish state should not be there at all, plainly cannot be addressed through negotiations of any sort. The Palestinian aspirations for a genuinely independent state not just a patchwork of semi-autonomous enclaves can be met. In the framework even of a renewed "peace process" whose purpose is to satisfy Saudi Arabia, not the Palestinians, they will not be. But here, as elsewhere, viable answers can only be based on the most consistent democracy, not on stop-gap pseudo-solutions which store up worse crises for the future.

A hundred thousand trade unionists stake a claim to a Europe for people not profit

Matt Cooper and Nick Holden, Brussels

Brussels on Thursday, December 13th, saw possibly the largest ever demonstration of trade union strength across Europe. Well over 100,000 people took five hours (on a working day) to march through the capital of the 'Europe of Profit' under the slogan, "Europe: it's us!" Huge contingents from the union federations of France, Germany and Belgium were joined by sizeable numbers from almost every other country in Europe – Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Even Poland's Solidarnosc had two banners and several dozen demonstrators. The smallest contingent was from Britain – a reflection of how isolated the TUC is from the increasing life in the unions of the rest of Europe. Decades of 'left' little-Englandism in the UK labour movement is partly to blame, but neither the TUC leadership nor the left could summon up much enthusiasm for coming to Brussels.

Tucked in among thousands of red, green, blue and orange-clad workers from across Europe were a couple of dozen TUC bureaucrats with only a handful of white flags between them, and a slightly larger left contingent, comprised mostly of the SWP – although those who brought union branch banners with them were having trouble finding people to help carry them. Significant, perhaps, was the complete absence of any party or political banners – the working class of Europe may be rising off its knees; but it remains deprived of any form of political representation, just as it does in Britain. More surprising, the European left was also largely absent. Possibly they believed they were keeping their powder dry for the 'anti-capitalist, anti-war' demo on Friday, but that is likely to prove to have been a mistake. Firstly, Friday's demonstration will be dwarfed, in both

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size and significance, by Thursday's. And secondly, the real progress at Genoa was the heightened sense of unity between union members and anti-capitalists, and the latter's small numbers on Thursday's march has not helped in developing that unity. We don't know yet, of course, how many trade unionists will stay in Brussels for the demonstration on Friday, but much of the potential for the left to intervene into the activities of the European organised working class has already been missed.

One big demonstration doesn't make a labour movement, of course, and the European Trade Union Confederation that organised this magnificent "manifestation" is the same layer of bureaucrats who failed to organise sufficient Europe-wide solidarity action to save the Vauxhall workers at Luton, or to defend their members in public services throughout Europe, who are all facing similar assaults from the private sector. Trade unionists leaving Brussels tonight should reflect on the possibilities that their demonstration represented. If the thousands upon thousands of union members who marched were now building a militant and confrontational European workers' movement then, truly, another Europe would be possible. But the lesson has to be that we cannot leave that task in the hands of the bureaucrats – whether in London or Brussels: we need a Europe-wide rank and file campaign for unions to fightback!

German Greens vote for war

Matt Heaney, in Berlin

The German Green Party met for its conference in the east German coastal town of Rostock recently. Proving, as has so often been the case, that (once-held) principles stand for nothing when political positions are at stake – in this case as junior coalition partner in the federal government to Gerhard Schröder's Social Democrats – the conference delegates voted by a huge majority...for war. A vote calling on the government to immediately stop the bombing of Afghanistan received only 292 out of a total 755 votes. The leadership's motion, "accepting" the sending of Bundeswehr troops "to fight terrorism" to the region, was approved – after a ten hour debate – by three-quarters of the delegates. This was more support than the leadership were hoping for, though there was no chance that the vote would have been lost. Always able to have their (organic, fair-trade, and therefore also very expensive – the typical Green voter, you could say, is a champagne non-(and in some cases ex-)socialist) cake and eat it, the motion stated that the party remains "bound to its pacifist traditions", and criticised the carpet-bombing of Afghanistan resulting in civilian deaths. Coming near to the use of slogans such as "Peace = War", "Love = Hate", or "Ignorance is Power", the Green leadership could be heard afterwards in the media calling for the party to "co-operate with the peace movement" in order to find solutions to the crisis in the Middle East. The peace movement, out of which the Greens evolved around 20 years ago was always loose and unclear, but it is unlikely that its remaining activists are so stupid to take up the offer to "co-operate for peace" with those supporting the war. During the debate, Green leaders such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit or Josef Fischer concentrated on the point that if the delegates voted

against the war, that would mean the end of the SPD-Green coalition.

The Greens have often been compared to the free-market "Liberal" party, the FDP, because of their similar support base. The FDP have also been known as "the whore of German politics", forty years long being willing to go with any (West German) party who would pay them off with a few posts in government. Without irony, Green Party leader, Claudia Roth, said, "the FDP would sell its soul — if it had one — to come to power" — and warning of this, and therefore the Greens must stay in government at any price. A party, founded out of the (collapse of the) peace movement; a party, which only a few years ago, still called not only for unilateral nuclear disarmament, but for the abolition of the German army — immediately; a party whose manifesto demanded the immediate closing of all nuclear power stations, and once in power, negotiated a gradual shutdown over three decades; and now, a party, which has voted to support the war. The Greens have sold their soul — if they had one — to hold on to power.

The Socialist Alliance conference in Britain

Two steps back, one step forward

Martin Thomas, in London

The Socialist Alliance conference in London on 1 December marked two steps back, one step forward. First step backward: the Socialist Party walked out after their proposed constitution for the Socialist Alliance was defeated and the Socialist Workers Party's [International Socialist Organisation in Australia – Ed.] proposal was passed with little amendment.

Second step backward: the SWP and its allies voted down all the amendments to their draft constitution establishing guarantees for pluralism, with only three exceptions.

Further disappointment: the conference voted down proposals to start a regular Socialist Alliance publication.

Step forward: the conference saw the emergence of a definite, though loose and disparate, body of opinion, over 150 strong in a conference of 650, explicitly favouring an active Alliance with a real political life (rather than a front) and pluralism in the Alliance (rather than just promises from the SWP and its allies to be generous to minorities). That definite body of opinion has significant representation on the new Executive of the Alliance. The future of the Alliance now depends on that body of opinion. Will we rally ourselves, or see our numbers eroding as individuals fade away, disappointed? Will we make ourselves an active and positive force in the development of the Alliance? Will we enter into constructive dialogue with SWP and Socialist Party members — pull SWP members into a more positive attitude to the Alliance and SP members into at least limited collaboration? To draw conclusions from the conference about the condition of the Alliance and its future prospects we have to analyse the votes there.

Two votes in the conference were counted. The proposal, moved by John Rees of the SWP near the start of the conference, that the Alliance elect our new executive that very day — i.e. only minutes after we had decided the method of

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election from among seven or eight possibilities — rather than giving time for nominations, hustings and so on at a later gathering, was carried by 315 votes to 256.

In the early afternoon we had a ballot on which "stem" constitutional draft to take as a basis for amendment. Each member could vote for a first and a second preference, so that if no "stem" got a majority on first preferences then votes could be transferred to find a "stem" which was at least the second choice of a majority.

Six drafts were on offer. The SWP and its allies — the International Socialist Group (ISG) and some "independents" — offered a rather diffuse draft, full of warm words about consensus and cooperation, but with no hard guarantees of the basic conditions for an Alliance with a real political life of its own rather than a "front". The SP proposed an elaborate structure of quotas and vetoes. Pete McLaren offered a tidied-up version of the current loose Socialist Alliance constitution as a "minimal structure for maximum unity". The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) offered a scheme much more like a constitution for an already-centralised party than one for an Alliance developing towards a party, though it included some guarantees for free expression by "platforms" inside the Alliance. WP offered a draft which did fit an Alliance developing towards a party, with amendable quirks. The Revolutionary Democratic Group proposed an adapted version of the Scottish Socialist Party constitution. Any of the six would have been workable with amendments.

In the event the draft moved by the SWP and its allies had a narrow majority on first preferences alone, so second preferences were not counted. The SWP got 345 votes; the SP draft got 122; Pete McLaren's draft, supported by the AWL, got 97; the CPGB's got 42; Workers Power's, 29; and the adapted-SSP draft, 21.

The total on the ballot, 656, was bigger than the total on the vote on whether to elect the executive, 571. Part of the difference will have been due to members abstaining on the whether-to-elect vote, the rest to members arriving late at the conference.

Workers' Power, the ISG, and at least 30 or 40 "independents" sided with the SWP in the whether-to-elect vote, so that vote gives us a figure of maybe 250 SWP there near the start of the conference, which would translate into maybe 280 by the time of the "stems" ballot.

On that reckoning, the 345 votes for the SWP "stem" were 280 SWP, maybe 15 ISG, and maybe 50 "pro-SWP independents". None of the later votes on amendments to the SWP "stem" were close enough to be counted, though two counter-proposals on how to elect the Executive (the AWL's, by slate, but with guarantees of minority representation, and Geoff Barr's, by STV) got very sizeable minorities (bigger for Geoff Barr's than for ours). That indicates that the "pro-SWP independents" stayed pretty solidly with the SWP. My impression was that maybe half the votes for the WP draft were from "independents" — some perhaps influenced by the AWL's expressed opinion that the WP draft was on balance the best of the "stems" on offer, though we were voting McLaren no.1 as part of a fight to save the unity of the Alliance. Maybe 10 of the votes for the CPGB draft would have been from "independents", and all the 21 votes for the adapted-SSP draft would have come from "independents" or very small groups.

The official CPGB line was to vote for the SWP draft no.2, and the official WP line was to cast no second vote at all. But if we had gone to counting second preferences, then anything up to 45 votes would have transferred from the three lower-scoring "stems" to the McLaren draft, to add to the 97 it had already (60-odd AWL members and sympathisers, 30-odd "independents"). The Socialist Party said they would put McLaren no.2; if they did that, then the McLaren draft would have had a total of 264 votes, 81 short of the SWP's.

None of the margins on the amendments to the SWP draft was counted, but none of them can have been much smaller than 80. The picture here is complicated by aberrant positions taken by two of the smaller groups generally in favour of us developing the Alliance into a proper party with a pluralistic political life, the CPGB and WP. WP opposed the launch of a Socialist Alliance paper which would as a norm include lively debate with the horrified plea that this would be a "Tower of Babel". The CPGB opposed guarantees for minority representation on the Executive with the argument that any fixed rule would be contrary to "party culture". (In the first place, the Alliance is not yet a party, and to adopt party-centralist structures prematurely can hinder it becoming one; in the second place, the AWL, as a centralised party-type organisation, has a "fixed rule" guaranteeing representation for minorities on our committee, and so we should have).

However, 80 out of 650 stands as a rough count of the margin by which we failed to achieve at least the possibility of keeping the Socialist Alliance united, and to make the conference into an event giving the Alliance a positive push towards a real political life. The breakdown was roughly this: about 280 SWP, 120 SP, 60 AWL, 50 "pro-SWP independents", 80 "pro-pluralist independents", 35 CPGB, 15 WP, 15 ISG. An "independents' caucus" during the brief lunchbreak drew about 70 people. The constituency of support for a lively Socialist Alliance, developing itself towards a proper party rather than just an electoral front, was about 180. It is a very variegated constituency, probably impossible to rally as a whole, but with wide support among the Socialist Alliance members who did not come to the conference — and, potentially, among many SWP members and "pro-SWP independents" who for now huddle hopefully close to the SWP out of disdain for the groups which they consider "sectarian" because of our stress on political argument.

The SWP and its allies reckon it a big step forward that the Socialist Alliance adopted a tidier constitution. The crucial improvements on that score — eliminating the two-tier structure of separate local and national membership of the Alliance, and regularising the position of the Alliance's executive committee — were largely non-contentious, and would have happened more or less any way the votes had gone at the conference. On procedure for selection of candidates, the provisions adopted are no special advance over those decided at the Coventry Socialist Alliance conference a year ago, in the run-up to the general election.

The essential steps forward were three amendments which slipped through the SWP net.

- To set up an Appeals Committee separate from the Executive. The SWP spoke against this, but half-heartedly. Evidently they signaled to many of their people not to vote against it, though they then turned out their full strength to insist

that two out of the five places on the Appeals Committee be taken by pro-SWPers.

- To establish the right of minorities to promote their views publicly and to take actions in conflict with majority decisions, though they should give due notice and not obstruct majority-decided Alliance activities.
- To insist that decisions be taken through proper committees and recorded in minutes, available to all members, which also include propositions rejected by the committees.

The SWP did not oppose those last two, nor did it oppose an amendment which removed the proviso in their draft constitution which would have enabled an ad hoc (and thus easily "packed") meeting of delegates from local Alliances to overrule or sack the Executive elected at conference. There was some triumphalism and glee from the SWP camp as the Socialist Party walked out. That was short-sighted, though up to a point understandable. The SP conducted themselves like people who had already decided that they wanted out — primarily because of their own bunker mentality. They took their stand on clumsy constitutional formulas, insisting on the right to veto any local Socialist Alliance decision anywhere where they had more than a tiny few members. Their cumbersome quotas-and-vetoes structure would have been as bad for real political life as anything the SWP might suggest, and in most (not all) areas SP members participate in local Socialist Alliances scarcely or not at all. The figures suggest that they deliberately under-mobilised for the conference in order to be sure of losing and having an excuse to walk out. The SP has dwindled a lot in the last ten years, but they could still have mobilised a lot more than 120 people for an event which they had prepared for elaborately and defined as make-or-break, probably enough more to change the outcome radically.

As for the SWP — it was in fact thirty years ago today that Sergeant Cliff taught the band to play. Thirty years almost exactly since 4 December 1971, when the SWP, then called IS, expelled its Workers' Fight minority faction (forerunner of the AWL). By 1975, after four other expulsions of different minorities, it had converted itself fairly thoroughly to its present culture of hectic agitation for whatever the Central Committee thinks will best "fit the mood" or "tap the anger" at any moment, and regarding serious discussion as something "sectarian" which "puts people off".

As in the song, the SWP tells the Socialist Alliance: "It's wonderful to be here/ It's certainly a thrill/ You're such a lovely audience/ We'd like to take you home with us/ We'd love to take you home". The significant development is the body of opinion in the Alliance which is not satisfied with being a "lovely audience" — the body of opinion with whom, indeed, the act they've know for all these years is guaranteed to raise not a smile but a wince.

Negative anti-SWPism can, however, kill this current of opinion as a political force. Everything depends now on whether we can rise above being dismayed at the SWP treating the Alliance badly, or pleased at the SWP treating the Alliance well — start to set the agenda ourselves, and to engage with SWP members as comrades who can be convinced.

Five suggestions:

- The Socialist Alliance has scheduled a trade union conference for March, focused around the question of political funds. What should the Alliance say about political funds? This discussion has been lurking in the recesses of the Socialist Alliance ever since the unfortunate "Make the break with New

Labour" broadsheet produced just before the June general election and then quietly disavowed. It should be brought into the open. The conference and its preparation should also take up other ideas: Socialist Alliance workplace groups, workplace bulletins, strike-support campaigns, and trade union bulletins.

- The conference voted against a Socialist Alliance paper, or even an information bulletin. Those Alliance members who rarely attend local meetings — unfortunately, they are many, and likely to continue to be many — have since the general election received nothing from the Alliance nationally except a thick bulletin full of draft constitutions and amendments. If we continue that way, it will be hard to hold those members. The pro-paper minority should get together and launch an unofficial Socialist Alliance paper or magazine. Though it could not claim to speak officially for the Socialist Alliance, it could promote Alliance policy — with due provision for debate — draw new members to the Alliance, and, over time, convince the majority that a proper official Socialist Alliance paper is necessary.

- Local Socialist Alliance meetings must be places where activists can come to learn and discuss, not just be a "lovely audience" for various prefabricated SWP-shaped campaigns (Stop the War, Anti Nazi League, Globalise Resistance, Defend Council Housing, etc.) The conference was cut short, on a snap vote called by the chair, before it got to an AWL resolution which called for local Alliances to develop that sort of political life — but no-one had ventured to argue against that resolution. It should be adopted by the Executive, and implemented.

- Work for the May local elections should get off the ground straight away in the New Year. The Socialist Alliance cannot afford to be seen by working-class voters as a group which just stuffs leaflets full of fine promises through their letterboxes in the few weeks before elections, and then disappears until shortly before the next polling day. In each ward where the Alliance is standing candidates, we should start with a "listening canvass".

- No foolish glee about the departure of the Socialist Party! Local Socialist Alliances should systematically approach local SP members to unite with them in campaigns (against privatisation, in support of strikes, and so on) and to take part in debates and discussions. That way, we may draw some of the better SP members back into the Socialist Alliance, and minimise any "backwash" pulling members out in the wake of the SP's departure.



Geoffrey Cumine A bohemian poet of the left who served in Gallipoli and France in World War I. He

REVIEWS

Socialist Register 2000

Reviewed by Ronald F. Price.

Leo Panitch & Colin Leys (eds.), *Socialist Register 2000: Necessary and Unnecessary Utopias*, Merlin Press, 2000.

Like a wide variety of socialist writers in recent years, the editors aimed in this volume to renew the socialist vision, tarnished during the 20th century, by both communist and social democratic practice. They rejected the view that utopian thinking is unscientific, and invited writers from the trade unions, women's movement, greens and a variety of academic disciplines to contribute.

Sadly, while the essays raise questions which require attention by anyone writing about a possible socialist future, they remain focussed where the strength of left writing has always been: showing what is wrong with the present. Where they do consider future alternatives (Johanna Brenner, *Utopian Families*) these are not post-capitalist, but within it. Diane Elson's interesting "Socialising Markets, Not Market Socialism" remains unintentionally within a transition period rather than exploring, as the notion of utopia requires, a more distant future. Others are more about controlling capital than replacing it (Varda Burstyn, Vice-Chair of Greenpeace Canada).

The introductory essay, by one of the editors (Leo Panitch) and the only trade union contributor (Sam Gindin), contains a review of recent utopian writing. They cite Terry Eagleton on the difficulties of imagining any world definitely different than their own and end by setting out ten dimensions for a socialist utopia, i.e. a genuinely different form of society from the capitalist and pre-capitalist societies currently around. These are: overcoming alienation; attenuating the division of labour; transforming consumption; alternative ways of living (community); socializing markets; planning ecologically; internationalizing equality; communicating democratically; realizing democracy; and overcoming the acquisitive and competitive drive. The need to develop genuine forms of democracy are mentioned frequently throughout the volume. Ricardo Blaug titles his piece "Outbreaks of Democracy". But instead of examining the difficulties and possibilities of a genuine democratic future he devotes some sixteen pages to short descriptions of democratic movements of the past. While interesting these do not really help us understand where to go from here. The environmentalist, Varda Burstyn, warns us in the title, "The Dystopia of Our Times", that we can expect little help with envisaging a future. He begins by asserting, rightly, that health is the first constituent of any conceivable utopia, and goes on to say: radioactivity, persistent organic pollutants and greenhouse gases . . . hang like a dead weight on the utopian possibilities of the future. Unfortunately, Burstyn, in sections on "New Diseases, Pollution Threats to Human Well-Being and Reproductive & Genetic Engineering", gives no informed assessment of what we might do to overcome these threats.

Colin Duncan, writing about "The Centrality of Agriculture", has some thought-provoking things to say about the future. He draws on recent experience of localised currencies, and points to the need to consider questions of scale. His conclusion is we need to return to long-past techniques of culture (agri-, silvi-
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and aqua-) is we are to achieve the abundance and low workloads which visions of socialism have required. While the women writers do not escape from capitalism their articles are among the most thought-provoking. Frigga Haug draws on feminist utopian writing and the experience of the now-destroyed post-capitalist societies, especially East Germany. Diane Elson considers how to socialise markets, developing an economy which would take into account the need for free time, human health and strength and other non-capitalist values. Johanna Brenner lays out the problems of "Utopian Families". What is now needed is an ongoing discussion, starting from Marx's vision of a society in which production is of use-values and not exchange-value, and in which classes based on economic exploitation have been abolished. This book can provide useful starting points for such discussion and as such deserves a wide readership.

Martin Thomas, in London, reviews a recent *Socialist Worker* pamphlet on the 'War against terrorism'

It is hard to see how the Socialist Workers Party's (in Australia the International Socialist Organisation — Ed.) new pamphlet *No to Bush's War* could convince anyone not already 'on side' to oppose the war. It seems not to have been written for that purpose, but instead to concoct a story to 'make the links' for activists in the 'new anti-capitalist' milieu. Its subtitle is: 'The military wing of globalisation'.

If its message is swallowed, rather than criticised, it will turn the new left into a caricature re-run of the Stalinist 'old left'. That 'old left' was morally compromised and politically crippled by 'power-bloc' thinking. It saw a world of two 'camps' — the 'imperialist' camp of the USA, and the 'socialist', or at least 'anti-imperialist', camp of the USSR — and its first duty as supporting the 'anti-imperialist' camp.

There is no 'socialist camp' any more. But the SWP is busy building up a picture of a new 'anti-imperialist' camp and urging us to rally to it. The main forces in their 'anti-imperialist' camp are the various regional powers which may clash with the USA - 'sub-imperialist' states, as Marxists have called them — such as Iran, Iraq, and Serbia at various times; and the whole jihadi-fundamentalist movement is, they insist, part of it too. The SWP criticises these 'anti-imperialist' forces — just as within the old left, at least from the 1960s onwards, criticism of the USSR was permissible and even sometimes vigorous. But for the SWP the criticism is always subordinate to fundamental solidarity with the 'anti-imperialist' camp — just as, for the old left, the criticism was always within the limits of basic solidarity with the USSR. The SWP used not to think like this. In the South Atlantic war of 1982 it opposed both Britain and the allegedly 'anti-imperialist' Argentine dictatorship. For the first seven years of the Iran/Iraq war (of 1980-88) it opposed that war on both sides. Then in 1987 it swung round to support Iran in the Iran/Iraq war, on the grounds that the USA's semi-support for Iraq made Iran's cause

'anti-imperialist'. It has subsequently backdated that attitude to the war's start in 1980 and extended it into a whole world view.

The new pamphlet is constructed round three main ideas. First, that world politics is shaped by a relentless 'drive for global economic and military dominance' by a nebulous force variously named as 'the world system', 'globalisation', 'imperialism', 'the West', or 'the USA'. Second, that other forces in the world are mere 'products' of that drive. Either they are examples of the rule that 'barbarity bred barbarity', 'barbarism can only cause more counter-barbarism', or they are 'terrorists the West has created'. Everything reactionary and horrible in the world is a mere reflex or creation of 'the West' — and yet, magically, even the most regressive of such forces can be progressive and deserving of socialist support if it clashes with the USA, no matter what about. That is the third idea — that we should side with the 'counter-barbarism' against the 'barbarism'. We should even side with the 'terrorists the West has created', such as Osama bin Laden, when 'the US's drive to dominate... turn[s] him and others (for example, Saddam Hussein's Iraq) against the West'. This third idea is not stated forthrightly. Despite frequent references to the Gulf War of 1991, this pamphlet nowhere repeats what the SWP wrote at the time — that Saddam's 'call for Israel to 'get out of the occupied territories of Palestine' will increase his standing among those Arabs who have supported the intifada... So, the more US pressure builds up, the more Saddam will play an anti-imperialist role... This means he will increasingly have to rely on one of his few remaining strengths, the Arab masses' hatred of imperialism. In all of this Saddam should have the support of socialists... Socialists must hope that Iraq gives the US a bloody nose and that the US is frustrated in its attempt to force the Iraqis out of Kuwait' (SW, 18 August 1990).

But the message in the new pamphlet is clear. It is the same message as in 1990. The SWP talks freely about how 'horrifying' the 11 September attacks in the USA were. It does not condemn them. The SWP has insisted that it will not condemn the attacks, though it has not explained why not in its public press, or in this pamphlet. The SWP's scheme of 'barbarism' and 'counter-barbarism' begs several questions. Even though the Taliban had US support in the mid-1990s, it is bizarre 'conspiracy theory' to blame its barbarism on 'the West'. It is nonsense to pretend that the Taliban is not more regressive than even the worst advanced-capitalist powers. And, in any case, why side with the 'counter-barbarism' rather than the 'barbarism'? Because 'barbarism can only cause more counter-barbarism', so supporting 'counter-barbarism' is the only way to fight 'barbarism'? Then how will we ever get socialism? In the SWP's pamphlet, every adverse comment on the Taliban, bin Laden, or similar forces, is immediately followed by an excuse — 'but the West is really to blame...'

'The American government denounces the Taliban regime as 'barbaric' for its treatment of women.' A true denunciation, or untrue? The SWP doesn't say. Its answer is: 'It was the Pakistani secret service, the Saudi royal family and American agents... that organised the Taliban's push for power'. Bin Laden was behind the 11 September attacks? 'It was because of the rage he felt when he saw his former ally, the US, bomb Baghdad and back Israel.' 'US leaders condemn the Afghan government...' Does it deserve to be condemned? No answer. The SWP quickly assures us that evils in Afghanistan are all down to the fact that 'the superpowers stepped in and poured petrol on the flames'. The SWP, though you wouldn't guess it from this pamphlet, used to refuse (rightly) to side with the

USSR against the USA. It called for 'Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international socialism'. In this pamphlet's account of Afghanistan, however, the USSR's 1979-89 war to try to subjugate the country, which killed a million Afghans and drove six million to flee as refugees, gets only a passing mention. 'Russia sent troops into Afghanistan in December 1979 to prop up its client government.' No comment. The SWP's condemnations are reserved for something else: 'The US threw its weight behind the assorted Afghan forces ranged against the Russians... flooded the country with arms.' Not the would-be conquerors, but those who (for their own reasons) aided the resistance, are the chief villains. The SWP explains 'Islamism' as 'a variety of movements that... express some of the bitterness of masses of people in predominantly Muslim countries... enormous resentment against the West and the local despots allied to it'. Fascism, too, and British working-class racism, often express 'resentment' against the upper crust. But for the SWP the fact that Islamism expresses 'resentment against the West' is sufficient for it to deserve the solidarity of socialists. That it 'can take a religious form, Islamism' does not bother the SWP. To them this is no more than a natural result of the fact that 'the majority religion in the region is Islam'. Why then in Latin America doesn't revolt take the form of some sort of Catholic holy war against the Protestant US elite? Political movements are more than just a photographic-negative image of what the US does in this or that region.

Political Islam is anti-worker

The 'terrorist methods' of the Islamists do bother the SWP. Why do the Islamists adopt such bad 'tactics'? The SWP cites 'rage at the suffering imposed by the world system' — but also, here, for once, allows itself to suggest that its 'anti-imperialist' allies have done wrong for a reason other than being 'driven to it' by 'the West'. Where the Islamist movements 'have had a mass character', as in Algeria around 1991, they have wrongly 'turned their backs on the strategic power of urban workers' and thus found themselves reduced to 'small groups', 'embittered' and 'desperate'. If only the Algerian Islamists had 'turned their backs on the workers!' In fact they turned their knives and guns on the workers, massacring hundreds of trade unionists. The difference between the Islamists and socialists is not that we socialists pursue working-class action, while they 'turn their backs on the workers' and choose less effective methods to the same goal — but that they have utterly different goals. Their reactionary goals of defeating the 'infidel' world; banishing women's rights, democracy, secularism, sexual self-determination, and individual liberty; and bringing 'death to America' and 'death to Israel', cannot be achieved through working-class action! Action by Islamist workers for these goals is no more progressive than action by fascist-led workers in Britain, France or Germany. Moreover, the Islamists are unfortunately far from just 'small groups'. They run the country in Saudi Arabia, in Iran, and in Afghanistan! They have mass support in other countries. To dismiss fascism as just 'a product of the capitalist regime', so Trotsky wrote in 1934, 'means we have to renounce the whole struggle, for all contemporary social evils are 'products of the capitalist system'... Fatalist prostration is substituted for the militant theory of Marx, to the sole advantage of the class enemy.... The increase in the misery and the revolt of the proletariat are also products of capitalism...' Politics is about which 'products of capitalism' we base ourselves on in their conflict with which others. To dismiss Islamism as just 'a product of the world system' is to evade politics. To adopt anything other than an attitude of mortal hostility to it is to disarm politically.

Karl Marx criticised the German socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle for his claim that everyone other than the working class was 'one reactionary mass'. 'The bourgeoisie', Marx pointed out, 'is... a revolutionary class - as the bearer of large-scale industry — relatively to the feudal lords and the lower middle class'; moreover, sections of the lower middle class could be won over by the workers 'in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat'. The SWP has a curious inversion of this idea. Advanced capitalism (aka imperialism, aka 'the West', aka the USA) is reactionary, and everything else, everything that comes into conflict with it, is progressive! Even the most extreme Islamists, like the Taliban, who, as one Afghan Stalinist rightly put it, plunged Afghanistan's cities 'into a black hole, 500 years back in history', are progressive compared to the 21st century! The SWP's approach whitewashes the Islamists, Saddam Hussein — and any local despot who comes into

conflict with the USA. It is also atrociously metropolito-centric and condescending in its attitude to the people of the world's poorer countries.

The socialists and democrats of those countries, who fight with great courage against the Islamists, are painted out of the SWP's picture. The SWP sees the people of those countries as capable only of 'rage' and 'despair', not of thought. When the 11 September attacks in the USA drive the US government to war which kills innocent Afghans, then the US government is to be condemned. But if people in Muslim countries feel 'driven' to kill innocent Americans (and also — though the SWP does not mention it — socialists, democrats, trade unionists and national minorities in their own countries), then the SWP shrugs. 'Regrettable, but what can you expect?'

Workers' Liberty journal re-launched: *Reason in revolt*, No. 67,

“In an age of barbarism”

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

Contents include:

In an age of barbarism; Elections in UK and France; The new turn of the SWP; Who are the anti-capitalists? China and independent working-class politics; Sylvia Pankhurst and democracy;

Lenin and the myth of revolutionary defeatism

Forum: Capitalist decline and progress? Kosova and East Timor

Reviews: Dreamworld and Catastrophe; Galileo's Daughter; Alas, Poor Darwin; Global Police and the Multitude

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The only way out of this cycle of 'rage' and 'despair' which the SWP can see is... for the new anti-capitalist movement, from its main bases within the West, to grow and hand down 'hope' to the benighted masses of the poorer countries! Certainly we must wish for the new anti-capitalist movement to grow both numerically and politically; and the stronger the socialist movement here, the greater the help we can give to (and receive from) socialist movements in poorer countries. But that begs the question of politics. The first plank of the pamphlet's argument is the claim that world politics is shaped by a relentless 'drive for global economic and military dominance' by a nebulous force variously named as 'the world system', 'globalisation', 'imperialism', 'the West' — or, to come down to specifics, 'the USA'.

The US government has done many evil things; US-based corporations and banks do many evil things; decisions by the US-based IMF are responsible for great misery; and Britain is an ally of the USA. All that is true; and on a quick skim-read, it may seem that the SWP pamphlet is only reasserting these facts, with a bit of permissible polemical exaggeration here and there. In fact the pamphlet's picture of the world pulps Marxism. The USA's giant corporations and banks dominate the world not through governor-generals, but primarily through capitalist

market forces. To combat the growing inequality, misery and cruelty of the world today, the first thing any serious socialist must understand is that these are fundamentally the product of the capitalist market system, not of any particular government's urge to tyrannise. A large part of the theoretical work of Karl Marx, in his day, was about arguing with radicals that they should no longer see their struggle as one of the virtuous people against the vicious aristocrats, but should contest the fundamental economic relations on which they stood. To regress from Marx's insight, and to see the whole of world politics as a matter of the unaccountable propensities to tyranny of George W. Bush and his friends, or of the USA, is particularly disorienting at the present time.

The 'new anti-capitalists' have come out on the streets against the policies of the IMF, the WTO, and the US government. What many of them are not so sure about is whether they should be fully anti-capitalist, or whether they just object to a distortion of capitalism by the people at the top in the big corporations, banks and governments. The SWP's pamphlet can only push them towards the second, populist, alternative — 'big is bad'. (It also pushes towards the SWP's view of such issues as Israel-Palestine in terms of 'bad' and 'good' peoples, with Israel incongruously in the role of the 'bad' big power). The

'new anti-capitalists' are hesitant about calling themselves socialists, for the very good reason that they abhor the Stalinism that was identified with 'socialism' in common discourse for six decades. What alternative to capitalism should they pursue? The SWP's pamphlet will push those who swallow its message towards identifying with reactionary, nihilistic anti-capitalism — not directly with Islamism, probably, but more likely with anarcho-populist anti-capitalism, a vision of overthrowing capitalism just by more and more spectacular street protests, without any particularly defined positive aims.

The 'new anti-capitalists' are commonly identified by the mass media as 'anti-globalisation', but many understand that to be against globalisation as such is to veer into parochialism and nationalism — a hopeless attempt to break down the world economy created by capitalism into smaller walled-off units, instead of building on it to create a socialist world. Here again, the SWP's arguments can only push them back. If globalisation is just the megalomaniac 'drive for global economic and military dominance' by the USA, the drive of which the current war is 'the military wing', then who with any sense can do other than oppose it flat-out?

The SWP's pamphlet, in sum, is a primer in anarcho-populist 'anti-imperialist camp' politics — or, more precisely, in the doctrine that precise political arguments do not matter so long as they seem to stir up feeling against capitalism, aka the USA. This approach, and these politics, may help build a small agitational group on the edge of the labour movement. They cannot possibly help equip young anti-capitalist militants to go into the workplaces and the labour movement, to learn to base themselves on the class struggle and to convince their fellow workers.

One further point about the pamphlet requires attention. So far as its picture of the 'drive for dominance' by the USA which is inescapably driving people in the Middle East to 'rage' and 'despair' is based on specific political facts rather than just attributing the results of capitalist market economics to the ill-will of the US government, it is centred on Israel-Palestine. Workers' Liberty is for the withdrawal of the Israeli military from the West Bank and Gaza, and an independent Palestinian state. But what really needs explaining here, from a working-class socialist point of view, is how rotten and chauvinist the Islamist view is, which tells workers as far away from Jerusalem as Morocco in one direction and Afghanistan or Pakistan in the other that their main enemy is not their own exploiters and rulers, but a small non-Muslim population in a small corner of the Mediterranean seaboard. That is not how the SWP sees it. For them, Israel somehow is the key to the 'stark contrast between wealth and poverty... in the Middle East'. 'Britain... encouraged Zionist colonists from Europe to seize land in Palestine, knowing they would be able to survive only by acting as a guard dog for Western [oil] interests. The US has taken over the dominant role from Britain since the 1940s. The methods of domination remain the same... The West backed Israel in its wars against Arab states in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973...' Etc. etc. The history here is cock-eyed. While Britain ruled Palestine, the Zionists there bought land (from Arab landlords) rather than 'seizing' it. Britain mostly did not 'encourage' them; in fact the British government banned all land transfers after about 1940. As the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany was escalating before World War Two, it closed the doors of Palestine to Jewish refugees. At the time Britain made its promise of aid for a 'Jewish homeland' in Palestine — in

1917, as a gambit for Jewish support in World War One — the oil industry was only just starting in the region.

The Jewish settlers were not then, and would never be, of any practical assistance to British (or later American) companies in maintaining their oil interests or in 'pacifying' the region. On the contrary, they soon became a handicap and an embarrassment. The West did not back Israel in 1948; it imposed an arms embargo on the Israelis, just as it did on the Bosniacs in 1992-5. British officers helped command the Arab armies against Israel, and Israel's main outside support was from the USSR (via Czechoslovakia). While Britain and France allied with Israel against Egypt in 1956, it was the USA that opposed them and forced them to back off. The picture here of Jews and 'the West' conspiring against Muslim peoples, with 'the methods... the same' ever since World War One, is little better than a socialistic gloss on the anti-semitic agitation of the Islamists.

The SWP does not spell out here (or in their recent pamphlet directly on the Israel-Palestine question, *The New Intifada*) what they propose to put things right. The implications are unmistakable, though. 'Israel acts as a colonial outpost with all the arrogance pioneered by Britain and France when they ran the Middle East before the Second World War.' The answer to the British and French colonial and semi-colonial domination was, quite rightly, to throw them out. But Israel remains as 'the colonial outpost'. (Of whom? Most Israeli Jews were born in Israel. It is not their 'outpost', but their home). The answer? Throw out the remaining 'colonial outpost'. Destroy Israel. The motive, for sure, is a sympathy with the Palestinians which we share. But loose demagoguery has its price. Here 'anti-imperialism' turns full circle, and by way of being translated into 'anti-West' sentiment, becomes a desire for the crushing of a small nation — and a weaseling endorsement of bin Laden's excuse for the 11 September atrocity.

REVIEW

Post-Trotsky Trotskyism examined

Leon Parissi reviews:

Bill Hunter: Lifelong Apprenticeship: Life and Times of a Revolutionary Vol. 1 1920–1959. London, Porcupine Press, 1998.

Sean Matgamna (ed.): The Fate of the Russian Revolution: Lost Texts of Critical Marxism Vol. 1 London, Phoenix Press, 1998.

Two books deal with the twin issues of the nature of Stalinism and its impact on the workers' movement and the post-Trotsky Trotskyist movement. Bill Hunter's is an autobiography. Sean Matgamna's is a work of historical revision.

Hunter's autobiography was written, he says, in opposition to "the Trotskyists who write about the past with their present subjectivity and prejudices directing their conclusions". This achieve this would be a challenge for anyone who was a major participant in many of the events described. One could also argue that because of Hunter's long involvement as a leader in the increasingly sectarian

Socialist Labour League (later the Workers' Revolutionary Party), led by Gerry Healy, his political heritage would not normally lend itself to such honesty. What makes the book an interesting read is the description of political developments in Britain and elsewhere, and the extent that he achieves what he set out to do.

Bill Hunter, a long time union militant and revolutionary, born in 1920, began his revolutionary political understanding when he was 19, reading the *Transitional Program*. In the early 1960's, Hunter, though less prominent in the Healyite movement nationally than he had been in the early 1950s, was their leading cadre in the north-west. Hunter was Sean Matgamna's mentor when he was in the SLL in his early 20's until Matgamna was expelled in 1964.

Sean Matgamna is a leading figure in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. His *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* is a re-assessment of Trotskyism which covers a lot of the same political territory as Bill Hunter. The two authors come to quite different assessments of the Trotskyist tradition.

Hunter maintains a mainstream neo-Trotskyist view of the nature of a workers' state defined by nationalised property relations. Matgamna takes what he argues is a more traditional Marxist view that a workers' state is one where the working class has political supremacy. Matgamna makes the case that Trotsky, on the one hand, correctly and without hesitation exposed the crimes of Stalinism, but, on the other hand, hung on to the idea that the regime of the USSR was still a workers' state defensible against capitalist attacks.

Both books also make an assessment of the neo-Trotskyist movement after Leon Trotsky's death, its splits and adaptation to the Stalinist/reformist conception of working-class politics. Hunter argues against this adaptation by the 'Pabloite' wing of the mainstream. Matgamna would add that Bill Hunter's Healyite tradition itself contained the same essential elements of adaptation. The source of this was Trotsky's underestimation of Stalinism's longevity and a collateral underestimation of the strength of capitalism.

Matgamna's thesis is summarized in the following passage:

"In 1929, many members and leaders of the Left Opposition in the USSR surrendered to Stalin because, in erecting the totalitarian power of the new bureaucratic class and destroying what was left of the labour movement, he also kicked the feeble NEP bourgeoisie into its grave. Trotsky did not. Trotsky had had an independent axis, which his partially false conceptions of Stalinism twisted but did not uproot. So too at Trotsky's end. The neo-Trotskyists had no such axis. Nor had they Trotsky's political and theoretical culture. They made of Trotsky's "unconditional defence" of the "workers' state" a dogma which had less and less grip on the reality of Stalinism, and combined that blind incomprehension on the level of theory with opportunist adaptations. They did remain critics of Stalinism and advocates of working-class democracy – while supporting Stalinism "against capitalism". This combination of eyeless dogmatism and sometimes exuberant opportunist adaptation to successful and "victorious" Stalinism produced very bizarre results within two years of Trotsky's death, and would continue to do so for almost half a century."

The axis Matgamna refers to is independent working-class politics. Matgamna describes the increasing tension during the 1930s between Leon Trotsky's accurate analysis of the reactionary nature of the Stalinism and his opposite conclusion that the USSR was still, in spite of this, a 'workers' state'. Trotsky indicted the Stalinist autocracy's use of "the classic methods of exploitation... in such naked and crude forms as would not be permitted even by reformist trade unions in bourgeois countries". The only reason given for denying the bureaucracy was a class is its acute instability. Matgamna asserts that "Trotsky was at the end reduced to defending his position with the argument that it would be "ridiculous" to append to the Stalinist bureaucracy and the system in which it ruled the designation of a new class society just a few years or months before its collapse."

Trotsky had taken as his starting point the Bolshevik understanding that the original Soviet regime could not survive by itself in a world dominated by international capital. The revolution could only succeed if it was supported by the spread of working-class power in the more advanced countries of Europe. The tide of post-WW1 revolution ebbed in Europe (there were unsuccessful revolutionary movements in Russia, Hungary, Italy and Germany). Then came the seizure of power by Stalin and from about 1929 the consolidation of that regime through what was a bloody one-sided civil war against both the weak capitalist forces of the New Economic Policy, the Bolsheviks and the working class.

Trotsky saw capitalism as a system at the end of its life. Trotsky wrote in September 1938 in *The USSR in War*, "The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible." A similar overestimation of the disintegration of capital is to be found in *The Death Agony of Capitalism* (also known as the *Transitional Program*). Clearly with the benefit of hindsight Trotsky was wrong. It is not hard to understand that from the depths of the Great Depression and the seeming inevitability of war after the Nazis gained power in Germany in 1933 that capitalism was in deep trouble.

Time and again the small forces around the Fourth International observed, analysed and fought against the betrayals of the reformist leaderships of the workers' movements – both the social democrats and the Stalinists. The objective conditions for a working-class overthrow of the rule of capital were at hand. Trotsky saw no way out for the bureaucracy either. Both systems were doomed and would be overwhelmed by the inevitable revolutionary upsurge to come in the wake of the Second World War. Trotsky was no cheery optimist but history shows that it was not to be.

War brings revolution – of sorts

The huge political convulsions that occurred during and after the Second World War were sidetracked into various dead ends. In the third world the working-class leaderships of revolutionary forces were weak and bourgeois forces created a variety of stable or unstable capitalist regimes.

In Eastern Europe after about 1947 the Stalinist parties were assisted into taking complete control, more or less against the *initial* intentions of Stalin, by the occupying Red

Army. As the German army retreated there was no stable bourgeoisie to fill the political vacuum. The Nazis had either destroyed the old ruling classes or they had fled overseas. Rather than promote working-class power Moscow commonly invited the members of the old bourgeoisie back to help form 'stable' governments.

Yugoslavia was somewhat an exception to this where a strong Communist Party dominated guerrilla force led by Tito, took power against Stalin's wishes. China in 1949 saw an independent peasant army led by Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Communist Party take power from a corrupt bourgeoisie led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang.

In the West revolutionary partisan forces were betrayed by their Stalinist Communist Party leaderships. Moscow wanted nothing more than to be left in peace to exploit their victory over the Russian working class. Their new position as the second world power would not allow this.

Italy from 1943 and Greece from 1942 saw great revolutionary movements. The failure of these partial and potential revolutions is described in detail by Bill Hunter. In the period 1945-48 he describes how there was not a factory in the north of Italy which was not armed. But as the Italian CP disarmed and, entered the government, the potential for revolution was defeated. Greece was largely in the hands of Partisans who were disarmed by their CP leaders. Those who resisted were destroyed by the returning British army

The other factor at work after the War was the strength of the victorious US economy that enabled the rebuilding of a shattered Europe through the Marshall Plan. Hunter describes how the Marshall Plan was conceived as a chance for US capital to profit and as a bulwark against the revolutionary tide which seemed to be sweeping Europe.

So as Hunter puts it: "the relationship of forces engendered by the effects of the war and the end of the war itself, which could not have been foreseen by Trotsky, did not bring the end of Stalinism, which, some tired Trotskyists complained after the war Trotsky had promised them." Hunter then goes on to take a divergent view from Matgamna: "The war did justify his [Trotsky's] conclusion as to the strength of the property forms created by the Russian revolution and the superior planning which, despite the decimation of the best of the Red Army's leaders in Stalin's purges, gave the Soviet forces tanks and aircraft that were the equal to and in some cases better than, those of the Nazis and enabled the great transfer of war production to the far East."

For anyone in Hunter's neo-Trotskyist tradition there is unanswered but important question of whether workers in Eastern Europe and elsewhere would have been better off under the Stalinist yoke or under liberal capitalism.

Here, Hunter, and the entire neo-Trotskyist tradition, misses the point. Trotsky's position was that if Stalin survived the war his class analysis of the USSR must be reassessed.

Matgamna's view, based on the same estimate of the strength of the Stalinist regime, is quite different. For him the continuation of Stalinism and its expansion confirmed the

conclusion that Trotsky was so reluctant to admit: that it was a relatively stable class formation.

Post-Trotsky Trotskyism

Matgamna shows how Leon Trotsky was on the verge of accepting the view that the USSR was a class-based society and not a workers' state. He held back from doing so. This hesitation became codified as orthodoxy after his death in the book *In Defence of Marxism*, a posthumous collection from the US SWP which selectively contains some of Trotsky's later writing. Hunter accepted the mainstream orthodoxy. For him all that was needed in Russia and other post-war Stalinist regimes was a political overthrow of the bureaucracy for workers to return to or gain control. Not that they thought this would be a simple task.

Such a position however led to ascribing revolutionary characteristics at different times and by different political groups to a variety of regimes which differed from orthodox capitalism and were in opposition to Western imperialist powers — Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Libya, Syria and of course in Eastern Europe, but none of which were examples of workers' direct control of the state.

The core of the problem for the neo-Trotskyist groups in the USA, Europe, Britain and elsewhere is the downgrading of a Marxist political axis — independent working-class politics. This in turn led to accepting the essentially reformist position of granting to non-working-class forces a revolutionary potential. Often this wrong assessment was based on strident 'anti-imperialist' talk or action by these liberation forces or regimes. This mistaken position continues today and can be seen in muted support for the 'anti-imperialism' of reactionary political Islam of the Taliban that is found in groups like the ISO or support for the Cuban regime by the DSP.

FORUM

'The Empire strikes back' or how to upstage the New World Order's "War against Terrorism"

Wayne Sonter, unionist and activist

In the Gulf War peace activists felt they had mobilized pretty well, considering how long it took to build comparable opposition (as measured by rally sizes!?) against the Vietnam War — the last one from which the US withdrew with a bloodied snout, pacifying its population for nearly 20 years.

However, the US — its 'coalition' in tow — achieved its purposes in virtually no time in the Gulf War. It put the blowtorch to a targeted nation state as a spectacle and warning to the rest of the world. Bush I announced the 'New World Order' (NWO), recognising the Socialist Bloc was finished after a 40-year Cold War.

There will be no more Vietnams — there is no contending power to run such a surrogate war (though counter-insurgency will be a common policing action). War in the NWO will be hi-tech 'blitzkriegs' against recalcitrant 'provinces' and extermination of subversive movements and heretical sects. It will take the form of a US-organized, globally-focussed annihilation of a region's life and infrastructure, the mess from

which the UN and 'the rest of the world' may mop up and restore; and police states instituted to overcome the working class and abolish civil law.

Those who oppose imperialism – in its guise as a corporate global economy that is driving humanity towards destruction, and as a global terroristic state apparatus that enforces and protects these monopoly interests: the rights of profit and exploitation over the people and sustainability – must respond appropriately to the 'War Against Terror'. The war is a wrap-around for a whole period in which imperialism hopes to suppress forces all over the world that are revolting against capitalist rule. The targets at times may appear predominantly third world – the old imperialist colonies — or fourth world; or those first world minorities who make up a layer or underclass — the 'excluded' (who are often third world migrants or indigenous folk). But capital's real target is its opponent – the world's working class and organised labour.

This points to the need for activists to organize ongoing groups, or peace committees that can endure in opposition to the "war against terror" and the prevalence of the NWO; able to instantly mobilize when a new theatre of war opens up, or civil, labour, human rights are suppressed; and meanwhile informing, educating, debating and advocating positive futures for humanity based on principles of peace, justice and sustainability, and the need for united working-class action around the world.

Uncovering the Lies

Post-Election Forum on Refugee Policy (5 December 2001, UTS)

Liz Macnamara

John Robertson says he regrets only two decisions he has made as Secretary of the Labor Council of New South Wales. Supporting Labor's policy on refugees before the last election is one of them. Robertson is a man who has stumbled. In the quiet desolation of loss he has been reading Ben Chifley's 'Light on the Hill' speech and reminding himself that 'if principles cost victory, so be it'. And if lack of principle costs victory, then, so be it.

We have a great objective — the light on the hill — which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand. If it were not for that, the Labour movement would not be worth fighting for.

(Prime Minister Ben Chifley, ALP Conference, 1949)

John Robertson has been reflecting on the 'immense pressure' that smothered his voice, that choked dissent from unions and from the working class before the last election. At a recent post-Election forum on refugee policy, he spoke of a 'conspiracy of co-operation' between the major parties. And he surprised his audience by admitting he was wrong. He was wrong, and he is going to do something about it.

Robertson has been to the detention centre at Villawood and repeatedly urged others to take the journey — to see for themselves, put their fingers in the wound and believe. It is an unlikely place to find the light, but he insists that is where it is to be found. A strong man, he transferred the emotion of this occasion onto his partner: it was she who was shocked, who

went from sympathiser to activist in one short visit. But it was his own voice that trembled as he faced his audience, some of whom let it be known this conversion had come too late.

Others will welcome this prodigal son, knowing — what parliamentary Labor have forgotten — that without the unions there is no labour movement. The Labor Council is polling its members, asking if they changed their vote last November and, if so, why. The results will be used in a campaign to be launched early in 2002 which will address the issues of racial tolerance in the workplace, immigration and refugee policies. The same issues will be the focus of next February's Annual General Meeting of the Labor Council which will reassess its role in these areas. Much will be expected of this meeting from those who have watched labour's leadership over the last year and cannot help but feel angry and betrayed.

"Anger has two daughters – courage and hope", quoted Dr Peter Hancock, long-time educator, who also urged the audience to visit detention centres and 'learn in the field'. There is much to be angry about and, as other speakers showed, much to be done about it.

Darryl French, an academic from Macquarie University, who welcomed the forum onto Murray land, commented that the "debate has resurrected an ugliness that I and my people have lived through... under the White Australia policy". He described the treatment of asylum seekers as "offensive, obscene and despicable", and with grim humour suggested that the theme song of those led by Howard and Ruddock might be, 'We live in a world of our own, that no-one else can share'.

Senator Andrew Bartlett, Democrats Refugee Spokesperson, concurred with Robertson's allegation of a 'conspiracy of co-operation' between the major parties and traced it back to Labor's years in power. It was Labor, after all, who began the demonization of refugees back in the late 1990's. He spoke of the need to convince Labor that there is a "clear workable alternative" and offered a glimmer of hope in his assurance that the government's policies are impractical and will provide a window of opportunity to improve the situation when they fail. Ruddock's recent admission that his Pacific solution may not be sustainable is perhaps the first crack in this door.

Anne Coombs and Susan Varga reported on the activities of Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), a loose affiliation of sympathisers who operate within their local communities. About a dozen groups have been formed so far with considerable success. Indicative of their popularity: a meeting at Bowral Memorial Hall recently attracted 500 people. Initiatives from the groups include organised visits to the detention centres; 'welcome books' which will collect signatures and be presented to asylum seekers; 'welcome towns', an initiative which invites towns with a population of 5000 or more to take on two refugee families and help settle them; and the Tampa Human Rights Award which has been presented to the captain of the Tampa for his courageous stand during the crisis. RAR are currently organizing a tour by the Queensland Afghan soccer team through country towns hoping to attract and educate those who might not necessarily imagine themselves as sympathisers.

Visits to Villawood Detention Centre can be arranged through ChilOut (Children Out of Detention), www.chilout.org. An Australian wide tour of detention centres is being organized for January 2002, those interested should contact refugeesarewelcome@hotmail.com.

Workers' Liberty

Why demos in support of refugees are not enough

Lynn Smith

Early In September we saw the conservative forces in this country whip up racist hatred in order to win over One Nation voters and thereby secure a return to government. Evidence has now emerged to support what most activists in the workers' movement suspected at the time: that Howard, Reith and Ruddock lied when they accused asylum seekers of throwing their children over the side of their leaking wooden boat. Howard, Reith and Ruddock also lied when they claimed that refugees forcibly boarded the Norwegian ship Tampa.

Many in the workers' movement were shocked and angry when (then) Labor leader Beazley said in the televised election debate with Howard in October, "on the question of asylum seekers and border protection, we and the Liberal party are one".

The fact that so little was done by left and trade union activists to try and reverse the rising tide of racism contributed, we believe, to Labor's subsequent thrashing at the polls. If the most volatile layers in Australian society (subcontractors, self-employed professionals, commission-based salespeople, long-term unemployed, small farmers, small shopkeepers etc.) had seen the workers' movement take powerful action in defence of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, significant numbers would have been drawn to the left. Instead, the left was seen as weak and powerless. Howard made the running virtually unopposed and the petit bourgeois went (as they usually do) with the strength.

Worker militancy

An example of working-class militancy having a decisive effect is after the independence vote by the majority in East Timor in 1998 when elements of the Indonesian military went on a killing and looting rampage. A wave of strike action by Australian workers against Indonesian interests was reinforced by blockades of Garuda facilities at airports in which all kinds of people participated. Howard was forced to offer Australian troops to the Indonesian government and the UN as a peacekeeping force. Upon the arrival of Australian troops the violence stopped.

Another example is the Mt. Isa miners' strike of the late 1800's. When scabs were brought in by management to work the mines, police were sent from Brisbane to protect the scabs. The feeling of solidarity created by the miners' action was so strong that many of the town's shopkeepers refused to sell food to the police.

Where did Workers Liberty stand in this? As members of the Socialist Alliance (SA) we helped to organise demonstrations in support of refugees and against racism. But we knew this was

not enough. We also tried to persuade activists in refugee support groups and in the trade unions to try and mobilise workers' industrial muscle. Two leaflets were prepared by Workers' Liberty in early September, neither of which saw the light of day. They were submitted to leading members in the Refugee Action Collective and to a trade union caucus of Socialist Alliance members. The reactions we got to the first leaflet from two Alliance members who are in the MUA was, first: "You won't get anywhere with that. The blokes I work with don't like refugees". This worker refused to hand out the leaflet on the docks. The other worker said: "This is ahead of where MUA members are at right now" and left it at that. The reaction we got to the second leaflet from the SA union caucus was indifference. The campaigns lapsed.

It is now emerging that during these intense days in early September when the Tampa crisis was on the boil there was quite a bit of anger expressed by unionists over Howard's racist line and Beazley's capitulation to it. For example, a motion was put to the NSW Trades and Labor Council by leading members of the Independent Education Union (IEU) urging unions to take action in defence of the refugees imprisoned on the Tampa. The reaction from the Trades Hall tops in rejecting this call was in essence 'wait until after the federal election because our main job right now is to back the Labor Party and try and get it into government'.

Activists in the IEU are not prepared to let the matter rest there. Nor are we.

We urge class-conscious workers to help build and to attend the "Trade Unionists 4 Refugees" forum to be held in Sydney in late January.

Refugees are workers and middle-class people fleeing to Australia from countries where it is impossible for them and their families to live decent lives and exercise their democratic rights. They are not aliens. Many of us would not be here if our parents, grandparents and great grandparents had not done this very same thing.

We must not allow the capitalist class to divide us along racial lines and set worker against worker. A campaign that combines education about what's going on inside Howard's and Ruddock's concentration camps with industrial action around specific events like stopping the deportations would build solidarity and be of real, practical assistance to people facing death or torture if they are sent back to where they came from.