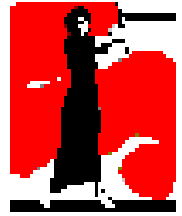


Workers' Liberty

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Socialist Alliance:

Build a class struggle left-wing - the key to support



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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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From anger to struggle

Socialist Alliance after the election

By Janet Burstall

The issue of solidarity for workers' struggles is likely to be highly contentious within the union movement under the Labor Government. Union leaders who can withstand the pressure from the peak union bodies to isolate struggles, and who can instead offer solidarity will be the key to strengthening the labour movement. The flip side of this means that if there is no effective solidarity for workers who do come up against the Labor Government, the workers involved are likely to learn bitterness and cynicism, rather than continuing to be active.

It is at the sharp points of union battles under Labor that the role of the Socialist Alliance could be most valuable. If we, in the Socialist Alliance, can build trust and support within ranks of the union movement, we can help lay the groundwork for the solidarity that will be needed. Workers who are angry and brave enough to fight against the Labor Government will have the most to gain from the solidarity of an organised national political force. And the more confident workers are to fight for their rights, the clearer will it become that Beasley's Labor Government does not represent the interests of working class people.

Winning votes for the Socialist Alliance is only one way in which the SA can help to build this confidence. We also have to be able to deliver on our promise to "give a voice to working class struggle". In order to be able to make this contribution after the Federal election, the Socialist Alliance needs to prepare for it within the election campaign.

However, the Alliance is not a fully-fledged party. The platform is limited in scope. The platform will expand and

develop through discussion at its first National Conference in August, and thereafter. Public debate and discussion about election policies, and the way forward under a Labor Government will help Alliance members to think critically about the platform too.

Just as important as fleshing out the platform as a document, is the need to seeking unity with other socialist and working-class groups, ahead of claiming SA ownership of agitational work. We need to seek to be a voice for actual working class struggles, not just the struggles we think that there ought to be. These links need to be made on the ground, by SA branch members, in dialogue with workers involved. The development of an effective platform and relationship with the labour movement cannot be forced along, and indeed can be damaged by centralisation of the making of political statements on behalf of the SA. Patience is needed.

In short, for the Socialist Alliance to become an effective force for developing working class politics under Labor we need to:

- continue to openly discuss the platform, particularly as new issues arise
 - maintain the alliance of political groups which formed it
 - encourage branch level links with local struggles
 - do the patient work with other groups and campaigns that can lay the foundations for credibility when solidarity action is called for
-

Left unity in the longer term

The groups which founded the Socialist Alliance united in response to particular circumstances - the experience of co-operation and success in the S11 anti-capitalist protests in Melbourne, and the inspiration of the British Socialist Alliance. But the need for left unity is bigger than the specific circumstances that have enabled this first step in forming the SA. While we are separate left groups we are confusing to people, who find it difficult to see why any one group is better than the other. It is a truism that as whole we are more potent than the sum of our parts - but still a good reason to try to unite. In separate groups we do not always take up the challenge of understanding other points of view and working out new ideas. This (in part only) contributes to our isolation from working-class consciousness and concerns more broadly, and we fail to learn the good habits of dialogue, listening, and relating our ideas to people's experience. It is healthy for all of our groups in this left unity project to have many more opportunities to talk with both working-class voters and one another. The need for left unity is enduring, and the Socialist Alliance should continue regardless of who wins the election, as long as we can act on and develop the platform that we already have.

The Socialist Alliance and preferences to Greens

The Socialist Alliance has stated that it will "prefer Labor candidates where we stand candidates and will call for supporters to vote Labor where there is not an Alliance or pro-working class green or progressive candidate (determined on a seat by seat basis)." Workers' Liberty is proposing that the Socialist Alliance needs some criteria for what constitutes a pro-working class Greens candidate. Repeal of the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act is Greens policy, which each candidate should be asked about. The other crucial question is whether on principle they will support any workers who go on strike. If they say it depends, we should ask them to clarify, depends on what? We should specifically raise the real threat that Mitsubishi will close its Adelaide car plants and ask Greens candidates if they will support Mitsubishi car workers going on strike for their jobs, even though the industry is environmentally damaging.

Learning from the British election results

An important start and the job ahead

By Martin Thomas

This editorial from Action for Solidarity in Britain contains some points that should be considered by the Australian Socialist Alliance. Particularly relevant are the election results, which were a much more modest success than some had expected. How could it have been better? Everyone says that we should not be sectarian, and this article clarifies a Marxist understanding. Canvassing or door-knocking for elections is a much stronger tradition in Britain than in Australia, and this article suggests the value of door-knocking to building a socialist campaign, and puzzles over the SWP's opposition to canvassing. Finally it argues for "a more class-focused political message."

On 7 June the Socialist Alliance made a start, and won some good results. That is an important achievement. Lots of new experience was gained, and lots of lessons can be learned. The elections can provide a springboard to take the Alliance on to a new stage of growth — as an active, lively, democratically-structured movement, pulling together thousands of socialists previously scattered and disunited, developing a dialogue with hundreds of thousands outside it, and winning real roots in some working-class areas.

Future success depends on honest and sober assessment of our first efforts. Millions of longtime Labour voters stayed home or voted Labour very reluctantly. Some went Liberal-Democrats because the Lib-Dems seemed to be a "realistic" protest alternative a shade to the left of New Labour. The Socialist Alliance has so far made only very marginal inroads into those millions.

The Alliance's average vote, 1.62%, was no higher than the common run of scores won by left-socialist candidates for many years now. Over 98 seats, the Alliance got about as many votes than Arthur Scargill's Stalinist-reformist Socialist Labour Party got over 114. Since the SLP is now just a signboard, no longer a functioning party; did no election work on the ground; and has nothing going for it but the 16-year old lustre of Scargill's name, this is sober statistical proof that we have not yet established ourselves with working-class voters as qualitatively less of a sideshow than the extravagantly sectarian SLP. It was never going to be easy. We are not in the middle of a big radicalisation. However much we welcome the Seattle, Prague and Genoa protests, they do not amount to "a new mood" in the working class generally, as the SWP claims. Strike figures are still near their lowest since statistics began. Disillusion, frustration, low confidence, and, often, demoralisation in the working-class are lifting only patchily. If we cannot face up to these facts, we will never be able to help change them.

Why the Socialist Alliance? Not because of a great growth of a new left. But because we must take on the job of fighting to recreate independent working-class political representation as Blair closes the channels for that representation which used to exist in the Labour Party structure.

That job cannot be done just by raising a "profile" and waiting for workers to flock to it. It requires years of work to recreate a broad socialist confidence in the working-class, and to establish a doorstep credibility for the Socialist Alliance as a force sensitive to and active on every democratic, socialist, and working-class battle.

It requires serious political work in the trade unions around the aim of regaining the working-class parliamentary representation which the Blairite hijacking of the Labour Party has, effectively, taken away from trade unionists. That should be done alongside, and in part on the basis of, work to organise the rank and file in the unions against the bureaucrats and for union democracy. We need to use the connections and experience we have won in the general election to begin sustained effort in

local government elections, in preparation for the next general election. That is how to build on the ground. In targeted areas, the Socialist Alliance can and should develop the sort of consistent, week-in-week-out responsiveness to local working-class concerns which builds roots in local communities. We should map out political programmes for how we think councils should serve their local working class and become bases for struggle against central government rather than executors of government cuts.

We have made a start. What lessons can we learn by examining it critically?

Analysing the figures. Of course, our average score was pulled down by a number of candidacies put up primarily to get the quota for an election broadcast, whereas all previous left-socialist election efforts for a long time past focused on a smaller number of local bases. But was our 1.62% the maximum we could have got, given the general political situation and the number of activists we had to start with? The result in Wyre Forest, where a local doctor won the seat as an independent backed by Health Concern — the local campaign to save Kidderminster Hospital — is proof that it is possible for new forces to win ground fast — if they can establish themselves as authentic voices of central working-class concerns. The fact that Health Concern has formed a coalition with the Tories to run the local council does not cancel out that proof.

To get what Lindsey German in Socialist Worker (5 May) defined as "a good result" — five per cent — across the board was probably never realistic. Was it beyond imagining that we could have got five per cent in "a number of seats" — half a dozen, maybe? — as we suggested in *Action for Solidarity* 41? The Socialist Alliance beat five per cent in two seats — Coventry North East, with former Labour MP Dave Nellist on 7.1%, and St Helens South, where Neil Thompson got 6.9% against the ex-Tory Shaun Woodward, parachuted in by Millbank as Labour's candidate against local trade-union wishes. It came close in two others. The SWP's Cecilia Prosper got 4.6% in Hackney South, where the Alliance has won a name by fighting the Tory-Labour coalition council's emergency cuts, and Ian Page got 4.3% in Lewisham Deptford, where he is a sitting local councillor.

The next best results were Nottingham East (3.8%), Coventry South (3.7%), Tottenham (3.7%), Liverpool Riverside (3.6%), and Manchester Withington (3.5%). Coventry South is where Dave Nellist stood in 1997; Riverside's and Tottenham's candidates had stood before. Nottingham East's and Withington's results, the best without such "special circumstances", need noting for further analysis. Some results were poor, even in constituencies where the Alliance has comparatively large numbers. In Camberwell and Peckham, a strong local Socialist Alliance put out a quarter of a million leaflets to get 478 votes, 1.9%. The SLP got 188, 0.7%. In 1997 — when millions voted Labour to get the hated Tories out after

18 years, when New Labour had not yet been tested in office, and when local MP Harriet Harman had not yet been exposed as the woman who would cut single parents' benefits — the SLP got 685 votes, 2.3% and the Socialist Party 233, 0.8%, in the same constituency. Some constituencies promoted nationally as "flagships" or models by the SWP (the biggest group in the Socialist Alliance) scored unspectacularly — Blackburn, 1.3%, Hornsey and Wood Green, 2.5%, Vauxhall, 2.6%, Streatham, 2.4%, York, 1.4%. In Cardiff Central, where the SLP got 2230 votes in 1997, the Socialist Alliance got only 283 this time out.

Sectarianism and the "long, hard view"

All sorts of factors can affect local results — the presence or absence of Green candidates, for example. But it is wrong to take too much comfort from the idea that we were bound to do badly "first time out". That is only in part true. The "socialist" banner is not new. It has been waved — in one form or another — for many years now. But with some voters, the forms in which it has been waved make the past as much a liability to us as an asset. They have been sectarian. When narrow-minded people complain about "sectarianism" they mean being argumentative, or unyielding about principles — qualities which are merits for socialists. We mean something different. Too often, visible socialist politics has been sectarian in the sense of putting the promotion of a particular little "party" machine above the broad class struggle. The Socialist Alliance is a great opportunity to go beyond sectarianism. How far have we progressed? What problems do we still have to tackle?

Marx defined sectarianism in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The Communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement... The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class..." And again, in a letter to the German socialist Schweitzer: "The sect sees the justification for its existence and its 'point of honour' not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from it". Leon Trotsky expressed the same thought by arguing that the rule for socialists must be "to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle". The growth of the Socialist Alliance reflects a wide desire to break with the "rally-round-our-rostrum" methods of the past. But we have a way to go yet. The dominant Socialist Alliance literature did not give workers' representation its proper centrality. Instead it emphasised a call to voters to "break with New Labour" and come over to a "socialist alternative". With no indication of how New Labour is qualitatively different from Old Labour, and what to do about it strategically, this approach is inescapably narrow. It translates as: "Break with the traditional labour movement and gather round our 'profile'." It must maximise the carry-over onto the Socialist Alliance of voters' bad impressions from previous sectarian socialist candidacies and campaigns.

The best results

Nottingham East's result — the best for a Socialist Alliance in a "routine" constituency — was won by consciously taking a different approach to the dominant one in the Alliance, favoured by the SWP, of raising a "profile" for "the socialist alternative" by stunts, loudspeaker cars, showbiz-star endorsements, and general leaflets, and waiting for votes to flock in. Local activists did what they could to get the Socialist Alliance's name known, and leafleted extensively — but they also set out to engage as many voters as possible in serious dialogue.

They canvassed, they went out and knocked on doors and talked with voters. The count showed much better results from the areas that had been canvassed than from those which had

just been leafleted. The canvassing educated the canvassers as well as the voters. Canvassers heard the arguments which were important to the voters. That enabled them better to do targeted leaflets — for hospitals, schools, postal depots, colleges — and to design their final leaflet to fit the arguments heard on the doorsteps. Their final leaflet raised squarely the question of workers' representation, which was downplayed or ignored in the dominant Socialist Alliance literature.

"The Labour Party is not what it was. It is now dominated by big business — in its policies and party structure. The democratic channels which once existed for working-class people and trade unions to influence the party have largely gone. Tony Blair treats trade unionists and ordinary Labour Party members with contempt... The Socialist Alliance is the only party in the election that opposes the domination of politics by business interests. Socialist Alliance candidates, if elected, will only take an average workers' wage. For us, representing working people is a privilege not a route to a personal fortune!"

Manchester Withington also made that central in their leaflets. "New Labour has abandoned all commitments to meet the needs of working-class people. It has abandoned the original reason for setting up as a political party, to fight for labour against capital. We now have to build again for proper political representation. The Socialist Alliance is part of that building process". One local activist reflects: "Our campaign profited from taking a longer, harder view, making the argument, and building up the support accordingly. We had more 'old Labour' input and were an 'alliance' more genuinely than other constituencies — though we didn't win the argument to canvass as much as some of us thought necessary".

The strange story of the "anti-canvassing" drive

In the last two or three weeks, the SWP launched a frantic and somewhat mystifying drive to tell Socialist Alliance activists not to canvass, but instead only to leaflet, organise loudspeaker cars, etc. That drive dominated the last part of the campaign in many constituencies. It was a strangely dogmatic "anti-canvassing", much more than "pro-leafleting". Even apart from the disruption involved — time and energy spent denouncing canvassers as "sectarians" (!) would be better spent on almost anything else — this drive was counterproductive. To harangue activists that only the very strongest local Alliances could possibly canvass; to throw out wildly exaggerated estimates of the numbers of activists needed to canvass effectively; and to insist that there should be no canvassing anywhere until there was perfect and repeated leafleting everywhere — could not but tend to "level down" our campaign. The push for a highly centralised, uniform campaign, run not from any elected committee but from an unelected national office, may have suited the SWP, but made local Socialist Alliances less able to develop real dialogue with voters. The SWP also denounced canvassers as "pessimists" who did not understand the "new mood". The results put the lid on that argument. There is not a "new mood" of people waiting only for a leaflet to drop through their letterbox in order to rally to the Socialist Alliance. There are millions of disillusioned, perplexed ex-Labour voters who can be convinced. But to convince them requires patient dialogue. The numbers we can reach through canvassing are limited — but not so limited that the gains won by it will be a negligible proportion of our vote.

Scientific precision is impossible here. But what if you have 30 constituency activists, and each puts in 30 hours' canvassing, speaks to 600 people, and convinces 15 of them? Is that improbable? It is an extra 450 votes — the difference between a poor result and a reasonable one. The "longer, harder view, making the argument", and an emphasis on dialogue, are also better for drawing new activists into the Alliance — much better, certainly, than the hectic no-time-to-talk approach which resulted in some local Alliances actually narrowing down, rather

than broadening out, as the election campaign progressed. Leon Trotsky once wrote: "Agitation is not only the means of communicating to the masses this or that slogan, calling the masses to action, etc. For a party, agitation is also a means of lending an ear to the masses, of sounding out their moods and thoughts, and reaching this or another decision in accordance with the results. Only the Stalinists have transformed agitation into a noisy monologue. For the Marxists, the Leninists, agitation is always a dialogue with the masses". The Stalinists, fortunately, are no longer on the scene. Their methods of agitation remain. The Alliance needs to get back to the Marxist way of doing it.

Building a democratic Alliance

Just as the Alliance needs to develop dialogue with working-class voters, so also it needs to develop democratic dialogue inside its own structures. This is not a luxury. Lessons can never be drawn, reorientations can never be made, disparate groups can never come together in a political "melting pot", unless there is space for civilised and careful debate.

The SWP's "anti-canvassing" drive raises questions here too, by way of its timing and form. Up to, and at, the Socialist Alliance executive meeting on 12 May, no-one opposed canvassing. The SWP was unenthusiastic; usually SWP members did not themselves canvass; but the SWP made no effort to stop or dissuade agents and organisers who wanted to canvass. Our manifesto was launched on 16 May with the written promise, in the introduction, that unlike other parties who address the electorate from a distance, the Socialist Alliance would be out canvassing. The "no canvas, only leaflet" method is, after all, really only a poor person's version of the through-the-media-only approach to the electorate now dominant in New Labour. It must be the quickest-broken manifesto promise in history! Either the SWP had sudden second thoughts — and, rather than discuss them with its Alliance allies, chose to use the weight of the SWP apparatus to impose them across the constituencies — or it had deliberately avoided debate on 12 May in order to bypass Alliance structures. Within days the SWP had launched a vehement "anti-canvassing" drive in most key areas. The whole campaign thereby suffered from the imposition of a stultifying centralism; the biggest group in it tried to impose something akin to its own "party" regime on the Alliance.

Making the Socialist Alliance a party?

The Socialist Alliance has become "a party" in common parlance just by contesting the general election. If it continues

as an active movement now — whatever the formal nomenclature and structure — it cannot but move more to becoming a party in the socialist sense, active in a united way on the industrial, ideological, and political-campaign fronts as well as the electoral. Should the Socialist Alliance become a party? Or, "more of a party"? Yes. But what sort of party?

An attempt to squeeze the Socialist Alliance into the sort of "party" commonplace on the left for many decades — monochrome and single-faction except perhaps on limited issues and in limited periods, and with every member compelled to spout "the line" whether they agree with it or not — would be destructive. It would abort what has so far been achieved, and create nothing but a new edition of the old SWP.

Lenin's version of democratic centralism was different. He explained: "The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and free freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free.... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings" (*Collected Works* volume 10 p.442). Lenin also (in *Left Wing Communism*) argued that the political conditions for democratic centralism could be "created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience". "Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrase mongering and clowning". To attempt any sort of democratic centralism, let alone the SWP's non-Leninist authoritarian version, would be inappropriate for the Socialist Alliance at this stage of its development. Yet what happened over canvassing was a drive within the Alliance to impose a first approximation of the SWP's version of democratic-centralist discipline.

In Lindsey German's article in *Socialist Worker* of 5 May, the SWP advocates that "resolution-mongering" should be kept down. It is an odd echo of the Blairites' scorn for "resolutionary socialism", and a poor welcome for ex-Labour activists. In New Labour, the space for resolutions and debate from the floor, which used to be sacrosanct even in right-wing Labour Parties, is being squeezed out or nullified. We must not have the same in the Socialist Alliance. Lindsey German's formula means few formal structures — and Socialist Alliance centralised primarily by being driven through an SWP-financed "national office" and full-timers. It is presented as a common-sense midway house between immediately declaring a formal "party" structure, and just letting the Alliance wither; but could institutionalise the regime the Alliance had in the election campaign.

Strong score in Glasgow

By Peter Burton

The Scottish Socialist Party won 3.4% of the vote across Scotland. In Glasgow they saved their deposit in every seat bar one, and won 10% in Pollok. It was a markedly better result than for the left in England. At the centre of it was the base won by the core group in the SSP — former Militant supporters (now the Socialist Party) — by strong activity against the poll tax, especially in Glasgow, and sustained by active attention to working-class concerns since then. Whether it justifies the increasing dominance in the SSP's agitation of the call for "an independent socialist Scotland" is another matter. That call may have won some extra votes. Whether it is reconcilable with a Marxist hostility to nationalism is something that will continue to be debated in the SSP.

Low turnout: the working class is being disenfranchised

By Chris Reynolds

New Labour won the General Election by a "landslide". They have an overall majority in the House of Commons of 167. And yet only about a quarter of the electorate voted for them! More people abstained than voted for Tony Blair. Forty percent of possible voters did not vote. It was the lowest turnout in any General Election since the introduction of universal suffrage. Some Labour voters told Socialist Alliance campaigners that Blair hadn't had a proper chance. But they were not too common. The weary, disgusted comment "They are all the same", "There is no choice" was met with far more

frequently. This was an election in which the most left wing of the mainstream parties was the Liberal Democrats! In which there was less choice then at any time since the emergence of the Labour Party early in the twentieth century. It was the first election in which it was unmistakably clear that the old Labour Party, the party created by the trade unions to represent working-class people in Parliament, had been hijacked and no longer even minimally represents working-class people.

The two main parties in the General Election, New Labour and William Hague's Tory Little Englanders, were two wings of the Thatcherism of the 1980s. People could see that. People turned their back on an electoral process that consisted of high priced, highly centralised political machines vying with each other in lying and obfuscation. New Labour fought a campaign of staggering dishonesty. They did their best to avoid discussing real issues. They demonised the Tories, so as to cover for themselves. For example, on race and asylum seekers. Hague's vile "Britain will become a foreign country" speech may well have helped those who are even more racist than himself in Oldham, where the BNP did very well. But the more profound work of stirring up racism by agitation against asylum seekers was done not by the Tories but by Labour's Home Secretary Jack Straw in the month before the General Election. Last year, even so mild and loyal a supporter of New Labour as Bill Morris, General Secretary of the TGWU, felt obliged to denounce the Government for fomenting racism with its alarmist talk of floods of immigrants.

Depoliticisation of a large part of the electorate is an inevitable outcome of what the Blairites have done to the old Labour Party. In the USA, where the two main parties are as alike as Tweedledum and Tweedledee and elections are a beauty contest and showbiz events, it is unusual to get more than 50% of the electorate bothering to vote. That is where Britain is heading — towards a heavily disenfranchised working-class. The Socialist Alliance has a huge job to do to present ex-old Labour voters once more with the possibility of working-class people being represented in Parliament.

British Socialist Alliance and unions

By Mark Serwotka

Mark Serwotka, General Secretary-elect of the British civil service union PCS, gave this speech (reprinted in part) at a meeting in London. He discusses the post-election challenges for the unions, including the relationship between unions and the Labour Party in the light of the Fire Brigades Union decision to use its funds to back non-Labour candidates even whilst remaining affiliated to Labour.

Over the Workers Comp issue the NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union may seem to have taken inspiration from the British FBU, however the NSW Firefighters' disaffiliation is a symbolic expression of rejection that leaves the NSW union without a positive avenue to express support for political representation for workers. (see article page 20)

Mark Serwotka was elected as PCS General Secretary earlier this year on a socialist platform. He was speaking in a personal capacity.

In the PCS, the dividing line was clear between me and the person I stood against. I was a rank and file activist, a Branch Secretary, low paid. My opponent was a Blairite full-time official, 21 years in the union, straight from university, never been elected, who basically argued for more of the same.

The challenge to the left is that, where we win elections, we have to turn that into advances for members. This is hard: in most cases we will be parachuting left wingers into a bureaucracy dominated by the right, who are well-entrenched. Often these people are more keen to fight the left than to fight the employers.

Another issue worth pursuing is how the development of the Socialist Alliance relates to the unions. On the one hand, some people could argue that we should bring the Alliance structure into the unions as an organisation that could be a force for change in terms of elections and developing a wider strategy. Others would argue - and I have some sympathy with this - that it is more complicated because the key in the unions is your attitude on the industrial issues: in many ways it's easy for people to say that they are a socialist, but when it comes down to making tough decisions on industrial issues people can break all over the place.

The decision of the Fire Brigades Union that they will no longer automatically use their political fund to support the Labour Party is a good development. No-one can say now that you support Labour or you do nothing. We can argue for unions to support candidates who agree with their policies.

Blair could not have been more upfront about his intentions on privatisation and the attack on public services. Privatisation is potentially the issue where we will see mass protest against what the Government. There will be a lot of pressure on union leaders to come out and back resistance to privatisation. This movement won't automatically happen, but the potential is there.

Already we've seen TUC leader John Monks say to that there could be a "winter of discontent" if Blair pushes ahead. I don't think he wanted to issue that threat, and he qualified it a lot, but he has been put in a position where he has to do something. We can build on this pressure. Focussing trade unionists on the issue of attacks on the public sector - privatisation, driving down conditions and job losses - is something that we should unite around in order to build a big campaign. This might start low key, calling for things like a national demonstration against privatisation and co-operation between public sector unions, but we should work for mass action across many different unions. There is evidence that people across the unions, in how they vote and the action they are prepared to take, are saying that they want a shift. Slogans and meaningless positions that we can say for effect but never be serious about implementing won't do. We, the left, will be the people who can potentially shape any new radicalism and give it some direction: we have to be serious about that. We have to do hard, careful work of preparation, to make sure we are ready to meet the challenges ahead.

We need to hold the union leaders to account. Many of the unions have excellent policies on paper, passed at their conferences. If unions followed these policies, we would have seen significant struggle and we would have made progress. The reality is however that the majority of union leaderships seek to ignore their unions' policies. We can focus attention around that. We need to come together to demand that the unions take their policies seriously.

Clearly something else we have to address seriously is the anti-union legislation and how we can challenge it. Many members think that the anti-union laws are something only the left is bothered about - until, that is, they are put in a position where they have to defend themselves and the law stops them

from doing it. We have to take the argument into workplaces up and down the land.

We need to fight for unions that are democratic organisations that implement their official policies, that take seriously their need to defend and advance their members' interests - and, crucially, are run by and for the members. We have to speak out against the creation of new labour aristocrats who earn marvellously high salaries who are often not elected by

members or, if they are, are guaranteed jobs for life if the members ever decide to vote them out of office.

I suspect that some of what the Government is planning will give us the potential to build on what we've already seen. Equally, those opportunities can be squandered - and there will be those who will work vigorously to ensure those opportunities are denied. The role of the left and activists across the union movement who are serious about defending themselves is to make sure we win that fight.

How women live and how we might live

By Janet Burstall

With reference to *How we live and how we might live* by William Morris.

William Morris was an early English socialist who died in 1896. His piece is an eloquent but dated drawing of the contrast between working class life in Victorian England and the socialist society which he advocated. He doesn't show any awareness of the domestic labours or concerns of women. Here is an anticipation of how the lives of working class women could be changed by socialism, with homage to Morris's greater eloquence.

When women organise so that our labour is not wasted, we will be relieved from working the double shift of wage labour and domestic labour. Mothers will be relieved of the triple shift which adds child-rearing as a 24 hour a day demand on our energy and attention, and we will have the freedom and leisure to look around and see what we really do need.

What is it that I need then?

First of all I need to be sure that my children are healthy, safe and loved. Many mothers (and fathers) suffer the agony of not being able to adequately feed their children, or to be able to get medical attention when they need it. Others are not sure that their children are well-cared for in schools and nurseries.

Then I need good health, the right to choose parenthood and physical pleasure. If I bear children it will be with joy as a conscious choice, and I need the means to choose not to bear children. I need to appreciate my own body and its strength, on my own terms, free from the images of impossibly manufactured stereotypes of female beauty. I need to be free to enjoy sexual relationships by mutual consent with men or women as I desire, without any shame or loathing. I claim this against the double standard which encourages me to be sexually available as a young woman, but condemns me for being a seducer and provoking unwanted sexual approaches and even rape. I claim it against the marketing of lifestyle products as the source of sexual appeal, health and pleasure, but which preys on my insecurities and makes a purchase out of every aspect of life.

I claim the right to education for the fulfilment and enjoyment of having knowledge, skills, an appreciation of and ability to undertake creative endeavours, and critical understanding of social relations and human history. I claim this in the face of the idea that education is for the purpose of separating those who will achieve personal power through economic and social success, from those who will be the failures, the wage slaves, the menial workers, the unemployed, the less worthy. I claim education to offer all the chance to reach their full potential, which will not place different expectations on children according to gender or race. I claim education beyond the boundaries of

schools, so children and youth can also learn in adult workplaces, as well as by increasingly acquiring responsibility to run their own lives. I claim for young adults the democratic rights and obligations to collectively plan and manage their own education and schools, with their teachers and parents. Children will learn how to be citizens of a true democracy from the earliest age. I claim the right of my children to learn this from adults, teachers, who respect the rights of children, as part of a society that respects all individuals and recognises their autonomy. I claim this against schooling's purpose of conditioning children of both classes for a future of obedience to the requirements of production for profit.

When we do not work to make profits for our employers then we will be able to reorganise our own work including our domestic labours. We will all be fed at school and work, and we will pack lunches no more. On every residential block there will be a communal dining hall where we can eat at any time of day. We will only shop, cook and clean kitchens when we want to, or when it is our turn as part of collectively allocated duties to work in a communal dining hall. Well-equipped teams of cleaners will do most of the cleaning as a share of collective duty. We will redesign our dwellings so that it is easy to keep company with others and to have our privacy.

All people who need special care, children, elderly, disabled will not be segregated but integrated into the activity of new collective dwellings, with the chance to make whatever contribution to the community they are able. Meeting their special needs for physical care will be shared amongst the community, and will free individual women and men from the exhaustion of being constant care givers. Young children especially will be treated as apprentices to adult life, and whilst playing they will also begin to learn the skills of adults as they join in with and watch the variety of adult activities that go on around them.

We can also claim a reduction in the labour that is needed to produce goods and other services. When we do not produce for profit, we can use new production techniques to reduce the time we spend at work. We can decide not to produce the vast range of useless and polluting commodities that capitalism makes because it can persuade people to buy them as a counterfeit for personal fulfilment. Useful items will be built for durability, not obsolescence, expansion of public transport will reduce fuel consumption and the number of vehicles to be manufactured. Wasteful activities to support capital's need to realise the surplus value it has appropriated, by promoting exchange and money management will be rationalised and then abolished - banking, insurance, advertising along with super star salaries

and luxury consumption. The manufacture of war machines and employment of armed forces will also end and decrease the time for obligatory labour.

We will be able to question what should be produced, what labour is actually required. We will be able to refuse wasteful, trivial labour. As a good citizen, I will be able to make my contribution to society willingly, without feeling that my good will towards others is being taken advantage of, or becomes a burden. I will do the work that I agree to do.

Released from the wastefulness of labouring in isolated homes, and enjoying a much reduced requirement for hours of labour, we women will find ourselves with a new freedom to recreate our lives and our parts in the collective life of our society.

We will have the time and the energy to participate in the running of society, to join in democratic councils which will plan further ways of reducing obligatory labour and maximising individual freedom and creativity. We will have the time to read and talk and heighten our interest in collective decision making. We will also have the chance to develop our own creativity, talents and interests. The separation between socially obligatory labour, and self-directed creative activities will break down, and the time required for the former will be even further reduced.

The distinction between obligatory work and voluntary activity would blur. Our contributions to society's needs would be made without stress, in pleasurable companionship or solitude when we prefer, using our skills and knowledge freely, able to be critical of what we do and the way we do it because we have the power to change it.

"Then would come the time for the new birth of art, so much talked of, so long deferred; people could not help showing their mirth and pleasure in their work, and would be always wishing to express it in a tangible and more or less enduring form, and the workshop would once more be a school of art, whose influence no one could escape from." (Morris) We will have the time and freedom to write, to make movies, music, designs, performances, photographs, stories... to realise our creative potential, through growing freedom from necessity.

Breaking chains

By Riki Revolutskaya

Are flowers worth more than lives? Activists associated with Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism (QUEER) commemorated the 6 June 20th anniversary of the announcement of AIDS with an action at Melbourne's 'floral clock'.

Crosses replaced the flowers to highlight the fact that AIDS infections are growing rapidly on a world scale and that victims in poor countries do not have access to the life saving drugs available in Australia, USA etc.

This resulted in an action on 6 June 1991, by Act-Up, which put the spotlight on the deaths being caused by limited access to anti-HIV drugs.

A huge debate has opened up on queer egroupp lists, with many conservative participants attacking the action. One respondent, Nick, has put them right:

"The queer community has only been able to advance through pressuring and questioning str8 society (e.g. Stone Wall Riots N.Y., the first Mardi Gras Sydney and most related to QUEER,

We will no longer need to face domestic conflict if our partners expect to keep us in the old role of servant to their needs. The role of housewife will vanish. Our economic independence is assured through the recognition of whatever socially useful labour we are able to contribute. We will not fear leaving a home that is no longer home, because there will be homes for all variety of needs, single people, large and small groups of adults, with or without children, and for young adults.

We will be able to form communities of cultures, identities and interests, where we feel the need. Our communities will have the means and freedom to maintain separate traditions and to exchange techniques, customs and ideas with others as they wish. The end of the domination or denigration of oppressed minorities especially indigenous peoples, the end of seizing what remains of their lands and traditions, will mean their freedom to choose their own terms for interacting with other cultures.

Our whole environment should be pleasant and beautiful, our homes should be spacious and light, our workplaces should be clean and quiet, our urban public spaces should be safe and attractive, our open spaces should be cared for. All activities carried on for a profit which create ugly, noisy, dirty factories and cramped offices in sick buildings, which degrade public spaces and which pollute waters and destroy ecosystems, can all be ended. We will have the power in our collective hands to create surroundings that are pleasant, generous, sustainable and beautiful for all.

There is nothing in the world to prevent this being done, except profit and the power of those who live on it. "All this, of course, would mean the people - that is, all society - duly organised, having in its own hands the means of production, to be owned by no individual, but used by all as occasion called for its use." (Morris) When working class women and men see that this is so, that they need not be slaves to the power of private ownership, when they believe in their own collective capacity to create a better world, then we shall stake all these claims and take our world into our own hands, and be free.

Act Up) this pressure at the time was not popular by any means and may at the time some conservatives said that it would create more of a problem. But, as proven it was extremely effective.

If people want to give a smiling face to the fact that we as a community are happy to be submissive and try to make it up to society, i.e. re-do the garden, all I have to say is this: Often we as queer people and many AIDS victims are done wrong by society, and many times society or the government has not come out to make it up to victims. Some of whom have died from AIDS or suicide from hate."

Whatever the merits of this sort of 'guerilla stunt', it is sickening to see conservative queers siding with our enemies in business and government.

I think it is better to concentrate on public actions that can draw people into action, like the demonstrations against George Pell (see below).

"George Pell — Go to Hell"

Queer activists in Melbourne and Sydney have put the spotlight on Catholic Archbishop Pell's outrageous attacks on queer people.

In Melbourne, QUEER (Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism) demonstrated on Easter Sunday at his last mass at St Patrick's Cathedral.

Fifty people held a pointed — and fun — rally. Speakers pointed out that suicide amongst young gay-identified men is 3.7 times that of their heterosexual peers. Negative attitudes from church leaders contribute strongly to the self-hatred and social isolation that drives this self-harm.

Connections were made with Pell's anti-woman attitudes on issues like access to IVF, promotion of "family values" etc.

I was very nervous before the demo — and elated afterwards. It is unusual to be directly challenging the church rather than the state or corporate entities. The internal barriers are much greater when up against an institution that has such a strong ideological hold inside our psyches — even when you had a relaxed religious upbringing like mine.

In Sydney, over 100 activists from GLAM (Gays and Lesbians Against Multinationals) and CAH (Campaign Against Homophobia) let Pell know that his bigotry was not welcome in his new town.

Police chose to attack the Sydney demonstration, in line with their generally aggressive approach to political protest since the Olympics. Three people were arrested and a number injured.

CHOGM - Join the protests, fight homophobia

Queer activists are building for a visible queer bloc in the protests at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Brisbane starting 8 October and at the CHOGM business forum in Melbourne the week prior to that. CHOGM represents a collection of politicians and the corporations who have control over the remnants of the British Empire. It will discuss privatisation and the corporatisation of public assets, free trade and the extension of user-pays systems, how governments and multinationals can better work together, free trade zones, and a better deal for business generally.

We need to protest for three main reasons:

- because of the people who will be there (our own prime minister John Howard, Robert Mugabe, the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe who is famous for his persecution of gays and lesbians, the Canadian prime Minister, Jean Chretien, who recently attacked protesters in Quebec with tear gas and rubber bullets;
- because of what CHOGM represents (globalisation and imperialism)
- because of what CHOGM prioritises (free market, maintaining third world debt, profiteering in the third world).

The Commonwealth Business Forum is held in Melbourne the week before the main CHOGM forum — from October 3 to 5.

CHOGM describes itself as having the theme, 'New Economy, New Challenges, New Opportunities'. "It will canvass business trends, review business practices and government policy issues. It is expected to provide new openings and opportunities for investment, trade and jobs growth".

There will lunches, dinners, cocktail parties, forums, brunches, backroom discussions of how corporations can make more money. Top of the corporate agenda is always business tax cuts, 'corporate welfare' in the form of business incentives, cutting back union rights to minimise wage bills, slashing environmental and occupational health and safety legislation and a general extension of the private sector into traditional public sector areas.

Mugabe and homophobia in Zimbabwe

Queers have a particularly strong reason to protest at CHOGM, because of the presence of the President of Zimbabwe, Robert

Mugabe, who is infamous for homophobia and his sanctioning of attacks on gays and lesbians.

Mugabe is well known for his verbal onslaughts on homosexuals, whom he has described as "perverts" and "worse than dogs and pigs".

The president's homophobia came to international prominence when the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) movement was banned from the country's international book fair in 1996. At the official opening Mugabe said "I don't believe [homosexuals] have any rights at all".

Some days after the book fair he continued his attack. "It degrades human dignity. It's unnatural and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. What we are being persuaded to accept is sub-animal behaviour and we will never allow it here. If you see people parading themselves as lesbians and gays, arrest them and hand them over to the police".

In 1996 GALZ the Chairman of the Board of Censors issued an order prohibiting GALZ from participating in the Book Fair. GALZ appealed to the High Court, which declared the government order invalid.

On the second day of the Book Fair GALZ was forcibly prevented from taking up its position at the Fair because a violent mob, led by Public Prosecutor Herbert Ushewokunze, descended on the GALZ stand. The Public Prosecutor stated that he and his followers represented "the People's Court" and that they "did not care about High Court Rulings".

The Zimbabwean government has repeatedly tried to silence GALZ through defamatory campaigns in the media, spurious banning orders and threats of violence; at every turn the government has been defeated by GALZ and its supporters.

Events took a further serious turn June 1998 with sodomy charges being brought against GALZ programmes manager, Keith Goddard. As a statement by GALZ puts it, "It would therefore seem that the case against Mr Goddard is clearly part of an overall strategy to discredit GALZ and its members."

In July a Bulawayo priest was jailed for five months for consensual gay sex — the first time that consensual sodomy has led to an innocent man being incarcerated in Zimbabwe. The punishment for consensual sex continues to be harsher than for people convicted of non-consensual sex. In November 1998, former President Banana of Zimbabwe was convicted of sodomy.

A recent fund-raiser for GALZ was cancelled after an organiser was beaten up at a nightclub where the event was to be held. Juan May-Lopes-Pinto, who was at the fund-raiser when his colleague was attacked, said police refused even to take a statement once they realised the victim was gay.

Members of GALZ also report a spate of extortion attempts, with both strangers and casual acquaintances threatening to report sodomy charges to the police if they are not paid to keep silent. Sodomy is illegal and can carry a penalty of two years in prison.

QUEER in Melbourne, GLAM and CAH in Sydney and QuACE (Queers Against Corporate Exploitation) in Brisbane are cooperating to make sure that queer issues are prominent at the CHOGM protests. One focus is the Queer Collaborations conference in July, which can act as a springboard.

To help organise, a national e-group list has been set up. Send an email to:

rad_kweer-subscribe@yahoogroups.com if you want to get involved.

Organising meetings to protest and blockade the Commonwealth Business Forum are being held (in Melbourne) by the O3 To CHOGM Alliance. The Alliance meets weekly on Monday nights at 6.30pm in the Lesley Clucas Lounge at RMIT.

HIH, One.Tel

Capitalism destroys its weakest links

By Riki Lane

The One.Tel and HIH crashes show the fundamental craziness of capitalism. Both companies competed on price - "bottom fishing" for market share by offering the best deals in the marketplace. They got that share, but at the cost of writing unprofitable deals. When the music stopped and everyone looked for a chair, they did not have one, and fell over.

The impact on bosses and workers has been quite different. And it has affected workers differently as employees and as consumers.

With HIH, the collapse has been a disaster for the employees, whose entitlements are in doubt, but also for workers as consumers. People have found themselves without house insurance, have suddenly discovered that the company building their house no longer is insured, community legal centres closed their doors for weeks as they had no insurance.

Insurance plays a central role for finance capital in distributing the risks caused by the chaotic system of allocating resources that is capitalism. When an insurance company, bank, or other financial institution falls over, the connections spread out into the real economy, causing massive disruption to people's lives. The Pyramid Building Society collapse a few years back not only meant that workers lost much of their savings, but depressed the Geelong economy for years.

Investors in HIH have lost their dough, but that effect will be spread out through large numbers of institutional holdings by super funds etc. It will boost the profitability of other insurers as they gain market share and are able to write more expensive premiums, without HIH dragging down the prices.

With One.Tel, again employees lose out greatly, while the Rich's of this world are busy protecting their assets.

But for workers as consumers, there is no loss at all. I have a One.Tel mobile phone on a two year plan. I can now walk away from my contract and keep my phone. There are some problems as Telstra and others try to handle the huge influx of customers - the waiting time on phone inquiries is amazing.

The investors, especially the Murdoch and Packer dynasties, have lost millions of dollars for a change.

One.Tel's problems were twofold - it's prices were unprofitable as it chased market share - and it's billing system basically did not work, so they could not actually get in the money owed to them. Once it was in difficulty with its cash flows, it's main assets (the contracts us consumers had signed and the network it was rolling out) became almost worthless. They cannot get any value from a contract that they cannot meet and a network with no

customers in an oversupplied market is no use to any other Telco.

The whole mess stems from the open slather competition that was introduced when Telstra's monopoly was ended. We now have massive over capacity in mobiles, optical fibre links, pay TV cables, etc. The proliferation of Telcos leads to massive inefficiencies as they all support billing systems, sales teams etc. Any efficiency gains from the mass redundancies at Telstra (of which I was one) are more than swallowed.

So what should socialists put forward as a solution? Some groups are calling for re-regulation. There are some problems with this. One is that you can encourage the idea that capitalism is OK as long as it is properly regulated. The reality is that capitalism needs weak companies to go to the wall. Clearing out One.Tel and HIH makes other companies stronger.

Defend workers' interests

Nationalising these companies alone would save their workers jobs, but would mean the state taking on the losses and bailing out the investors. If we call for regulation within capitalism, we need to be very clear exactly what we want regulated - we want workers' interests defended.

We need to argue that these collapses show the inherent insanity of the capitalist system and the need for social ownership that is aimed at meeting human need rather than the search for profit. Immediately we support action to win sacked workers their entitlements.

A resolution carried by the Canberra Socialist Alliance summed this up well in regard to HIH:

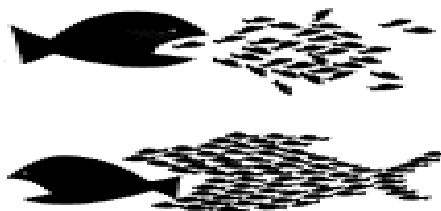
The collapse of HIH and the collapse of a number of small and medium-sized firms, plus the instability of the banking system during the 1991 recession, all show the madness of the financial system and the impossibility of the market protecting people's lives.

It points to the urgent need to nationalise superannuation, workers' compensation and domestic insurance immediately.

Therefore we stand for the nationalisation of the insurance industry and the finance sector in general.

This should be accompanied by a program to guarantee incomes and employment for workers from the finance sector, and a reduction in working hours.

The insurance industry generally should be taxed to pay the costs of the HIH bailout.



Iran: only workers can force through change

By Martin Thomas

The huge vote for a relatively liberal candidate in Iran's presidential election on 8 June is unlikely to have any effect on the regime. Muhammad Khatami won 77% of the vote, with his nearest rival on 15%. The harder-line Islamicists made no effort to unite on a candidate who might have challenged Khatami seriously. But Khatami's first presidential term, from 1997, even combined with the relatively liberal majority in parliament since elections early last year, has had no noticeable effect in easing the grip of fundamentalist clerics. Almost all their measures, however timid, have been vetoed by Iran's "Supreme Leader", Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, or by the "Guardian Council" of Islamic scholars and clerics. Khamenei has ruled out any parliamentary discussion of changing Iran's repressive press laws, and has ordered a crackdown including the closure of some 50 publications and the arrest of many journalists and activists. Whatever happens in elections and parliament, the hard-line clerics continue to control the judiciary, the armed forces, and the "charitable" foundations that dominate the economy. Election results will not change that. What may be the emergence of new illegal independent trade unions, one of which has taken a brave and outspoken line against the scapegoating of Afghan refugee workers for Iran's dire economic problems.

Fight for jobs in NSW TAFE

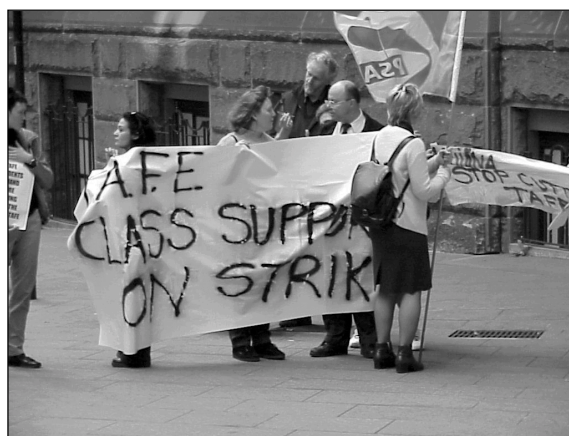
By Leon Parissi

A rally to save jobs and services in New South Wales Technical and Further Education (TAFE) on 13 June, was a successful action organised by ordinary members of the Public Service Association (PSA) under threat from the latest round in a series of TAFE downsizing exercises. 64 jobs in direct class support (people who run the laboratories and workshops where pathology or electronics students are taught) are to disappear after 1 July from Ultimo TAFE.

After fruitless negotiations since February desperate union members achieved a meeting with the Head of TAFE by going into the foyer of the Department of Education and Training Head Office and refusing to leave until someone (preferably the Minister) came to receive the petition to save jobs and services. The Minister responsible, John Aquilina, had been ignoring Public Service Association requests for a meeting. The PSA General Secretary had requested a meeting in order to "avoid industrial action". That was on the 18 May. Nothing had been heard since and understandably the members whose jobs are under threat were angry about being ignored.

With a stubborn refusal to take notice of arguments about the effects such drastic job cuts would have on the provision of education services at Ultimo TAFE PSA members felt that the only alternative was industrial action. Since 24 May there has been a series of rolling stoppages. What is needed to ensure victory in this dispute is to spread the issue of jobs and services into wider sections of the public service.

The PSA officials signed off a 16 % wages deal which contains an unfunded 6%. That 6% salary increase is scheduled to come into effect over a period beginning 1 January 2002. An unfunded wages rise can only mean even more job losses when in most departments and agencies the salary bill is by far the greatest cost. What is needed is a industrial and educational campaign among PSA members with a demand that the State government fund the 6%. Perhaps the Sydney Institute fight for jobs can provide a spark of inspiration for other NSW public service unionists to also fight back against the Carr government's anti worker program. Both Labor and Liberal governments support a program of encouraging private vocational education providers and of commercializing traditionally public funded courses. TAFE Institutes are forced into expanding commercial offerings in competition with private providers. This puts enormous pressure on TAFEs which have in the past offered the tradition laboratory and workshop based courses which are expensive because these facilities require support staff as well as teachers to run.



Interview

Richard Sanders from World Trade Organisation Watch and Griffith University, Queensland.

By Meryan Tozer.

Richard Sanders is an academic in economics who has been lobbying against international free trade treaties, such as the now defunct Multilateral Agreement on Investment, and the one currently on the agenda of the World Trade Organisation: the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The GATS, initiated at the end of the 1995 Uruguay round of negotiations, focuses on removing trade barriers, particularly governmental regulations, to the global trade of services. In this interview he talks about the implications of GATS and his vision for a 'sustainable society'. This interview arose out of a recent address to Friends of the Earth, Brisbane. The article by Rosie Walker which follows the interview gives a Marxist counter analysis.

MT: Can you explain some of the problems with the General Agreement on Trade in Services?

RS: GATS is about exploiting the resources of a country and the people of a country. European and American corporations are looking for resource-rich and labour-rich countries, so it

doesn't really matter whether it's Australia or the less developed countries, the agenda is about ensuring that the wealthy in the world can get hold of the resources they need from wherever in the world they come from, as well as reaping the benefits of cheap labour.

One of the most worrying implications of GATS is its effect on the public sector. Public funding is deemed to be a subsidy under GATS. That is, subsidies are anti-competitive and would put a foreign service provider at a disadvantage. So, if Harvard University, for example, wanted to set up via the internet for students in Australia, it would be at a disadvantage if our government didn't fund it equally to how it funds Australian universities. Effectively governments will either have to be even-handed to the public domestic sector and the foreign private sector, or they will pull out of the funding altogether because they don't have the money for both.

The other aspect is that any law, regulation, measure, action, decision of governments that in any way impinges on the profitability or activities of a foreign service provider (for example, environmental regulations or social standards which impose greater costs on corporation) could be challenged in a tribunal. GATS is about removing any impediments on a foreign service provider entering the country, doing business in the country and making a profit in the country.

MT: How is a treaty like GATS an example of neo-liberalism?

RS: Neo-liberalism is basically the ideology of leaving everything up to the market, and GATS is an instrument to remove all impediments and restraints on the market in the area of services. It is one of the means by which the neo-liberal agenda is being implemented. At the domestic level in Australia we've got things like national competition policy which is achieving the same effect and, at the international level, the WTO covers some 17 different trading agreements about putting in place the neo-liberal agenda of economic liberalisation, which boils down to commercialisation, privatisation, deregulation and so on.

MT: What do you think is the most important way to challenge GATS and the broader neo-liberal agenda?

RS: Information and the facts. People have to understand that, while these things are sold in a propaganda sense as 'the free market equates with democracy', the reality is that the free market is the antithesis of democracy. Putting it in simple terms, democracy is about the public deciding what is going to happen. Neo-liberalism is about a handful of people who are very wealthy deciding what is going to happen through the strings they pull from their purchasing power.

The problem we have at the moment is that the propaganda machine is continually telling people that globalisation is inevitable, and that is a very powerful mantra or propaganda tool. It means that politicians will develop policies that are consistent with that 'inevitability', which makes it become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Similarly with the public, even if people are hurting from structural changes to neo-liberal policy, they will wear it because they believe it is inevitable and accept it.

The single most important message to therefore get out is the fact that it is not inevitable. Part of the beauty of this whole thing from our point of view is that the proponents of neo-liberalism have no solid factual or empirical basis to their argument; their argument is based on assertion. It means that we can reveal the factual situation, and that is very illuminating to the public.

For me, the thing that we really have to worry about is the fact that we live on a 'spaceship', and we are in the same sort of boat as Apollo 13 was, with the life support systems going down and maybe with only 20 – 50 years time up our sleeves to not only realise we have to fix it, but to fix it in that time. It's

something like GATS which could provide the rallying call to bring people together in common cause to turn things around.

MT: As people interested in social change we need to be talking to the public about agreements like GATS, but we also need to be making demands on our government. What sort of demands do you think we should be making?

RS: The first place to start is with informing the public. We have to get the public sufficiently motivated so that they participate in what's happening... At least 80% of the people are aware of the fact that economic rationalism is a major problem and needs to go. So you have a fairly powerful common ground on which you can mobilise people in the first instance.

Once we have politicians taking note, then I think it's absolutely vital we start pushing for positive international agreements; we live in a global world which is interconnected, so in terms of an overarching vision for society, we need global rules. On the other side of the equation we need our economic activity to be primarily local and to get things as locally as possible.

With our trade and investment rules, we need an organisation like, for example, the WTO, but its rules need to be almost inverted to what they are at the moment. The first set of rules has to be about the ecological integrity of the planet and maintaining the life support systems intact. We have to maintain the stock of natural capital, then live off the interest that it can provide us. So, for example, if we have a mango tree, the tree is the capital and the fruit it gives you each year is the interest. As long as you only take the fruit from the tree, then you have the source for a long time. The next thing we have to be concerned about is the welfare of the people and all living things. So we need ethical and moral rules about what is appropriate human behaviour. Finally, we need economic rules which, assuming we still have markets, will mitigate against the flaws of markets. So we will have economic activity serving people's needs, rather than people serving an economy that is benefiting only a small group of people.

MT: Aside from sharing information and raising awareness, where does the agency for this change come from? The people who are benefiting from the means of production are not going to simply hand over their wealth, it is those who are on the other side of the equation who have to take up the struggle.

RS: The agency for this is the people. Like all human phenomena, it will not happen without some sort of leadership or catalyst, it needs to be made to happen. The organisation I have created, Quest 2025, is intended to do just that; the process of change will happen when, first of all, people are educated and understand what is going on. It works through the internet; on the Quest website there is a whole suite of issues and each issue has its own sub-site with associated email lists so that people can discuss and strategise around each issue. Each issue is couched in terms of economic rationalism either being at its root or exacerbating it, and the first step in the 'Quest' is to roll back economic rationalism before moving on to the next part of the vision. Basically it means a shift initially in a more Keynesian direction, which is a more public sector oriented system, where wealth is redistributed back down to the bottom.

MT: Does Quest operate as a decision-making body?

RS: No, it's purely to facilitate people working together in common cause. So it doesn't make decisions, but it does articulate an analysis of the current problem and espouse a vision of what the sustainable society would look like, and how we can get there.

MT: How do 'we' as the 'people' move forward with collective strength if there is no decision-making body?

RS: The website is the mechanism through which you co-ordinate horizontally across all of the interest groups in common cause in terms of winding back economic rationalism. My idea for the on-the-ground side of things is to institutionalise a national discussion day, a given day every two months. On that day, people right across Australia would come together in their communities to talk about a particular issue. Through that process people would start to work and organise in their communities, and identify the servant leaders amongst them. When the next set of elections come around, they can then vote for these people instead of the parties which have co-opted the political system to their own ends.

MT: Can you describe the sort of economic change you think we need to build a more ecologically and socially sustainable society?

RS: Given the ecological crisis we are in, we have to fundamentally restructure the economy into something very different from what we know today. That kind of economy is one in which communities co-own a durable stock of capital, "durable" meaning things that will last a long time and provide a flow of service. For example, a solar refrigerator which is a simple heat pump with no moving parts and, if made out of the right materials, can provide a community with a flow of coldness for 2000-3000 years. Not everything can be made that durable, but it shows the principle.

For the needs that are met by living systems — food, soil, air, water — for example, you have a healthy tree that provides a yield for many years, and as long as you don't use the tree for firewood, you have fruit indefinitely. So it's about slowing the economy down to a trickle but, in order to do that, you have to build this big infrastructure first that everyone co-owns that is made of highly durable natural capital that then provides the things that communities need. It would then be in the interest of these communities to maintain their stock of capital intact, because if they don't maintain it, then the flow of service it comes from is going to stop.

Rather than having people employed in jobs for income, people will live in communities where these things are flowing into the communities, and the lesser amount of work that needs to be done compared to today's society is decided amongst the community. From my experiences travelling through places in Africa and Asia, I've seen societies operate on that basis and I don't see why they can't operate everywhere, where people do things because it's the right thing to do.

MT: What are the flaws in the current financial system?

RS: The financial system around the world is what they call a 'fractional reserve system', in which all money exists as interest-bearing debt. Under this system, the money supply grows exponentially at the interest rate. To illustrate the logic of the money supply growing at 6%, if you started with one cent in the year 1 A.D. and it grew at 6% compounding, by 1993 when I did the calculations, the value of that cent would have grown to the equivalent of 100 thousand galaxies each made up of one billion stars weighing the weight of our sun, each made of pure gold at US\$328 per ounce. That's the logic of that exponential growth, which is impossible in the real world, but real in the fantasy world of economists. Under fractional reserve banking, private banks can lend more money than they have because new money is being created through the taking out of new loans. With a fractional reserve of 10%, on the strength of \$10, the

bank can lend \$100. With a 50% reserve, on the basis of \$10 it can lend \$20.

On the other hand, I advocate a 100% reserve system, where banks can only lend the money they have got. Under a 100% reserve system, the only agency that can create new money is the 'reserve bank' or central bank; governments can create new money for projects and, as long as those projects are worth the amount of money that was created, there will be no inflationary effects. If our 'spaceship Earth' is going to survive, then we have to build a completely new economic infrastructure; the money to fund that can come from the reserve bank.

If money is created by a government, then the government decides on what projects are needed in the community interest. The government is the people, we have to move away from thinking of government as something that has just been co-opted by a couple of political parties for their own purposes. So we might decide, for example, that we want to solarize the power system, so the Reserve Bank of Australia could make available the funds to pay a team to transform our power centres into solar energy.

MT: Would it mean the abolition of credit full-stop, or would it mean the abolition of profiting from credit?

RS: Both. Credit is really an illusion that allows you to transcend the law of physics. The easiest way to explain credit is, for example, in the old days when people were growing wheat, if they had a surplus they would store it. You could only store it for so long before it would rot. The nature of all wealth is that it rots over time. Gold is one of the few exceptions, but even with gold it wears away from passing between hands. So everything loses value over time — that is a law of nature, the Second Law of Thermodynamics. What money allowed people to do was, instead of storing the wheat, sell it to the neighbours, say, for a handful of gold, and later on when they needed wheat, they could go to whoever had wheat and hand over the gold in exchange. Where the problem came in was that money grows exponentially over time because you have an interest rate, whereas the wealth that it represents actually deteriorates over time. So what you've got is an arithmetic decline of wealth over time that is linked to money growing exponentially over time. You get an ever-increasing disjuncture between the two realities.

The reality is that things rot and the idea that you can have a bundle of money growing exponentially flies in the face of reality. If you started 2000 years ago with a cent, somehow you'd have to generate a universe of gold. So the money or credit side of the equation does not work. Having said that, credit is still useful as a way in which a community can pool its resources and do some work to create an asset that then realizes the credit that was advanced. But once we've created our sustainable society we won't need that facility any more, so we will be able to move away from it. After 25 years economic growth we'd move away from a full-on monetary system. By then, the infrastructure we could build would give most people a quality of life that most Western people are accustomed to; it wouldn't be a high-consumption lifestyle, but the services would be of the same standard as we now get.

MT: Would you only nationalise the banks? Would other private institutions exist?

RS: I personally don't think that private institutions are a good thing, simply because they mean that a small number of privileged people share in the benefits. If everything is in the public sector then all of the benefits can be shared by everyone.

MT: To achieve that desired system wouldn't it then be an imperative to regulate all 'exchange centres' because people would bypass the reserve banks and use the private institutions as mini-banks?

RS: In theory there is no problem with there being private banks because the point is that banks not be allowed to lend more money than they have got, whether private or public. It should be up to the people to decide how big the pool of money is – that could be expanded or contracted as decided on politically – and the banks, be they public or private, would simply be in the business of mediating between someone who has deposited in a bank and someone who wants to borrow money. The only money that could be lent would be money that has already been deposited.

MT: How would an initial re-distribution of resources or 'capital' occur and how would it be maintained?

RS: I think we have to move to a global governance system, where ultimate decisions are made in a global forum, so that if there are people in one part of the world that need a particular resource, arrangements could be made for it to flow to those people. If oil was seen as an essential, then the world's pool of oil would be seen as everybody's and each area would be apportioned a flow on the basis of how many people lived in that area. There would not need to be markets or payment, the oil would go where it is needed and people from each community would take part in the labour process. For some things it would operate like that, for other things it would be more autonomous.

MT: What of 'leadership' in these communities?

RS: At the moment the world is made up of tribes of people and, in my experience, there are rarely conflicts between the 'ordinary' people of these tribes. Conflicts are between the people who lead. There are two kinds of leaders; there are those who are there to serve and better the community, and then there are control freaks. The challenge for people in the democratic process is to choose those who are servant leaders. Never vote for somebody who wants the job! You are looking for the person who you know from experience has the community's interests at heart. We also need to have a mechanism whereby if that person does go off the rails, you can recall them and vote for somebody else who can take over.

MT: So you wouldn't do away a leadership structure, but it would come down to a more local level with an option for 're-call'. Do you also agree with a system whereby leadership positions are rotated amongst the community?

RS: A rotation basis is a good idea but the public also needs the option to vote someone back into power if they do a good job. The public needs to be able to override the basic rules or procedures. I think the institutions that we have in the main we should keep. For example, I think that the way our parliamentary system works is pretty good; the problem is that we have allowed a small number of people to control them for their own ends. Those institutions in and of themselves are an evolutionary product of human wisdom that are, in fact, as close to ideal as we may get, particularly the social democratic institutions that we see in Europe and, to a lesser extent, Australia.

Utopianism

By Rosie Walker

Richard Sanders expresses radical ideas about the way society could be reorganised. His outlook has much in common with the utopian socialists whom Marx both drew on and criticised 150 years ago, in particular, the socialists following Owen in England, and Fourier and Cabet in France. We print this interview with him as an illustration of a more thoughtful exposition of concerns and hopes which shape the perspectives of many of the activists at S11, M1 and of those who are against developments in international trade, such as manifest in the demand to "drop the debt".

It actually has very little in common with a Marxist understanding of the issues. He sees change coming from "the people" in general with no recognition of the class relations between capital and labour as definitive, and he understands capital and value as similar fixed resources, not as deriving from human labour and relations of exploitation. Richard also expresses confidence in parliamentary democracy, and a hope for state ownership of resources within parliamentary democracy.

Despite this, he would not necessarily like to see competition abolished — he believes in the right of the private banks to exist. Yet this plan becomes tangled when he asserts that the role of the banks "be they public or private, would simply be in the business of mediating between someone who has deposited in a bank and someone who wants to borrow money. The only money that could be lent would be money that has already been deposited." What, then, the *raison d'être* for private banks to exist?

Drop the debt or rot the debt?

Richard makes an argument from analogy in which capital can not, as a fact of nature, be legitimately accumulated without its value "disappearing". "The nature of all wealth" says Richard, "is that it rots over time." And so, according to him, the problem of third world enslavement to the credit system can be solved when the money lent does not exceed the money held (in reserve by the banks). But how are the products of human nerve, muscle and brain subject to the "Second Law of Thermodynamics"? What comes must pass — true enough, and trivially so — but that can hardly account for the exchangeable qualities of any commodity. How do commodities achieve their parity for the purpose of exchange? They are all products of human labour, the expenditure of which occurs for definite amounts of time.

A single value in the form of any one commodity "disappears" only when the value created in the form of human-produced good and services experiences a generalised increase, or when there is full-scale value-destruction (such as in war). According to Richard, credit that acts as a "future promise" to pay should be outlawed. But this denies fundamentally the labour theory of value, and so Richard is unable to distinguish between credit that is useful and assists large-scale production projects for human need as would occur under socialist arrangements, and credit that allows the ruling class to secure — in the financier's terms of reference — its future domination of the world's working class.

Socialists know better. Under the capitalist system, human labour power is a commodity, just like any other commodity, that can be bought and sold at market. That may also extend to the future if it is not interrupted by mass revolutionary socialist upheaval, and the promissory note of the credit

dollar does not breach the natural order as Richard seems to suggest. The political and moral dimensions to Richard's argument are altogether absent.

Communist Manifesto

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx outlines the deep utopianism of such views. We quote it at length here since it responds directly to many of Richard's points. We still find its assessment of plans such as Richard outlines in his "Quest 2025" entirely pertinent:

"Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action; historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones; and the gradual, spontaneous class organisation of the proletariat to an organisation of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history, resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.

"In the formation of their plans they are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working class, as being the most suffering class. Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them.

"The undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own surroundings, causes Socialists of this kind to consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without distinction of class; nay, by preference, to the ruling class. For how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible plan of the best possible state of society?

"Hence, they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments,

necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social gospel.

"Such fantastic pictures of future society, painted at a time when the proletariat is still in a very undeveloped state and has but a fantastic conception of its own position, correspond with the first instinctive yearnings of that class for a general reconstruction of society."

"The significance of Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism bears an inverse relation to historical development. In proportion as the modern class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification. Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed mere reactionary sects. They hold fast by the original views of their masters, in oppositions to the progressive historical development of the proletariat. They, therefore, endeavour, and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms. They still dream of experimental realization of their social utopias, of founding isolated *phalanstères*, of establishing "Home Colonies," or setting up a "Little Icaria" — pocket editions of the New Jerusalem — and to realize all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois. By degrees they sink into the category of reactionary conservative Socialists depicted above, differing from these only by the more systematic pedantry, and by their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science.

"They, therefore, violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from the blind unbelief in the new gospel."

Review

The Zapatistas: A Rough Guide, Chiapaslink (2000).

Reviewed by Pablo Velasco

It is a highly readable account of the Zapatista movement since the uprising in 1994, written by British supporters, based on visits to Chiapas, which at the same time lets the Zapatistas speak for themselves. It locates the relevance of the Zapatista struggle in the wider anti-capitalist movement that gathered pace at the end of the 1990s, and seeks to promote international solidarity between this struggle and others internationally.

The book is refreshingly frank about the scope of the movement, even when it exposes their political limitations. The Zapatistas do not aim to replace state power, neither via the bullet or the ballot box. In their own elliptic phrase, the Zapatistas say, "*We want a world in which there are many worlds, a world in which our world, and the worlds of others will fit: a world in which we are heard, but as one of many voices.*" (p.9) They describe globalisation as a jigsaw of seven loose pieces, which will never fit together, illustrating the absurdity of the new world order (p.27). Indeed, one cannot help but be impressed by the sheer poetry of their expressions, in spite of the lack of clarity they exhibit.

The book sets out the terrible poverty that afflicts Chiapas. Infant mortality is double the national average; malnutrition runs to 67% of the population — in 1993 alone 30,000 died of hunger and disease. Yet the state is resources-rich, boasting 90% of Mexico's oil exports and the involvement of global capital such as Monsanto, Shell, Exxon, Nestle, Intel, McDonalds, Disney and Ford. Robbed of their land, subjected to racism and discrimination dating back 500 years to the Conquistadors, hounded by government sponsored paramilitaries and the army, the Zapatistas have led indigenous Mayan peasant communities in an armed struggle much as their forebears had done for centuries.

At the beginning of 1994 their cry of Ya Basta! — Enough! — resonated around the world. The book recalls the great wave of solidarity which swept Mexico in support of the uprising. It records the land invasions in which 1500 properties and 90,000 hectares were occupied, and the experiments in collective land ownership this evoked. The prominent role of women, who make up one-third of the combatants is well-explained, as is the importance of international and Mexican solidarity. I recollect marching through Mexico on those demonstrations in 1994-95, soaking up the great collective purpose which inspired the hundreds of thousands of participants. The great meetings held in Chiapas, the Convention (1994) and the Intercontinental meeting (1996) indicate the broad, democratic character of the movement.

The book recalls the COCOPA and San Andres Accords (1996), endorsed in a popular vote by over 3 million people, which demanded autonomy and indigenous rights, still denied by the Mexican government. Initially mobilising 15,000 troops into the region, there are now fully 70,000 soldiers, one-third of

the Mexican army in Chiapas, and one soldier per three Chiapas inhabitants, engaged in what can only be described as medium-intensity warfare. The Acteal massacre in December 1997 was a symptom of this overwhelming military presence. It is highly unlikely that the new President, Vicente Fox, will resolve this tension, given his overwhelming bias towards big capital that so desires to exploit the region.

My main criticism of the book is also my main criticism of the Zapatista movement itself, namely that it does not look to the working class as the crucial agent in bringing about the kind of liberation needed by the indigenous peoples of Chiapas and elsewhere in the country. Nowhere does it seek out an alliance between the peasants fighting for their own land and the struggles of workers for higher wages, shorter hours and free trade unions. Yet this is precisely the kind of urban movement which is burgeoning in Mexico, and which has received a tremendous boost by the electoral defeat of the PRI this year.

Dan La Botz has argued, (*Mexico Labor News and Analysis*, January 2000), that the Zapatista political wing, the FZLN, "has failed to fulfil its promise to engage in politics in a new and different way". Yet the working class experienced a seminal victory by the Electrical Workers' Union (SME) against privatisation in 1999. The SME have put themselves forward as the centre of a new alliance of unions and social movements, and represent the most hopeful sign on the political horizon. With the PRI-controlled CTM in decline, and the growth of the National Union of Workers (UNT) an independent trade union centre representing over 1.5 million workers, the prospects of a genuine working-class movement are bright. Forging an alliance between Mexican workers and the indigenous fighters is absolutely vital if the new situation is going to lead to fundamental change in Mexico.

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Mexico Labor News and Analysis can be contacted at: DanLaBotz@cs.com; and <http://www.igc.apc.org/unitedelect/alert.html>

Review

Naomi Klein's *No Logo*

Reviewed by Lynn Smith

I can see it now. Two designers are shooting the breeze in a studio somewhere.

"The book's called *'No Logo, taking aim at the brand bullies'*. What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

: "Forget the title. Our job's to design the cover".

'You're not hearing me. How can you represent a title like that? Soon as you put pen to paper you've created a logo of sorts!'

"You're the smart arse. Be creative. That's what they pay us for."

'Hey, I've got it! Plain black and white cover... sans serif type... no pics.'

"Nah. Too shallow. This book's for intellectuals."

'OK.... think tricky... how about... ya basic black... it's in fashion... and for those in the know it says... anarchy... black balaclavas hiding faces... busted windows at Maccas... that sort of stuff... sound good?'

"Perfect. Except saying she's an anarchist might limit the sales."

'OK. How about we chuck in... a dash of red. Plain black and white... no pic... with a spot of red. Means anarcho-syndicalist to some. A bit left to others. Kinda... *No Logo* but not really.'

"Killer! Naomi's gonna LOVE it".

The purpose of the above scenario is not to denigrate what is a well-researched and damning indictment of the way big capital operates. Many of the examples of super exploitation Klein documents are truly shocking. e.g. workers in China often having to work 16 hour days and in one case, workers forced to do shifts that last for three days and sleep under their machines. And the case of Carmelita Alonzo who was literally worked to death in a Philippines Free Trade Zone garment factory.

It is encouraging to how many books have begun to emerge on this subject e.g. "The Essence of Capitalism" from Australian radical historian Humphrey McQueen.

I am approaching *No Logo* as both a socialist and someone who has spent a large part of his life as a media worker. The introductory scenario is meant to illustrate one of the main fault lines in Naomi Klein's book i.e. there is such a thing in mass communications as *No Logo*.

A logo is the visual and/or literal crystallisation of what a brand of product, service or coordinated human activity represents.

There are logos for sports shoes (swooshes, leaping felines, 5-pointed stars). For sliced bread (usually involving sheaves of wheat). For fast food chains (the big M arch for McDonalds). For schools (often featuring coats of arms). For sports clubs (usually based on something associated with the sport like a cricket bat). There are also logos for community activists (Picasso's dove for the anti-war movement). For nation states (flags in different colours, with stripes, stars and symbols). For political parties (green for the Greens, the hammer and sickle for the workers and peasants that the Bolsheviks were fighting to liberate from feudalism and capitalism).

Although they are by no means the same thing, in Klein's world the terms 'brand' and 'logo' are interchangeable. A brand is the whole consumer experience and includes the physical product or tangible service to be consumed, its name, the way the name is presented visually, pictorial devices which accompany the name, the packaging, advertising, in-store and collateral material e.g. brochures, web site, newsletters, T shirts, bumper stickers etc. If you subtract the item to be consumed, a brand is a package of symbols used in mass communication, one of which is a logo. The sight gag is also a symbol used in mass communication. As is exaggeration. Pathos. Irony. Metaphor etc.. Communication tools do not belong to the capitalist class but to human society. Logos have been in use for thousands of years... long before capitalism was invented. Think of the crescent of Islam. The Jewish Star of David.

For ease of reading let's assume brand and logo are synonymous. I will now switch to the term brand... the term Klein herself uses through most of the book when describing a corporate entity (we won't say product or service because for some reason Klein can't bring herself to admit that corporations are selling tangible use values and not just status symbols).

Once she has wished the tangible out of existence it is but a short step for Klein to invest the brand with metaphysical powers. "Behind the pie in Bill Gates' face and the bottle shattering the window in Prague there is something too visceral for most conventional measures to track- a kind of bad mood rising. And the corporate hijacking of political power is as responsible for this mood as the brand's cultural looting of public and mental space. *I also like to think it has to do with the arrogance of branding itself: the seeds of discontent are part of its very DNA.*" (my emphasis).

To say that brands are inherently anti-social is like saying that shovels are inherently anti-social because serial killers dig graves for their victims with shovels.

If the anti-capitalist movement had taken Naomi Klein seriously, S11 (and subsequently M1) would be a betrayal. The use of the first letter in a given month combined with a number to represent a particular day in that month has now come to

mean that a large, anti-capitalist blockade is going to take place in your city on this date.

S11 was without doubt a brand/logo. The cover design for *No Logo* is without doubt a brand/logo. Are both "arrogant"? Do these brands/logos also have anti-social elements "contained in their very DNA?"

Klein develops this position further when she talks about the heart of US capitalism. "Wall Street ... is guided by spiritual goals as well as economic ones". Capital is like water... it follows the least line of resistance in the drive to achieve the highest possible profit. There is no such thing as an adequate profit. The board and major shareholders keep pushing for more, more, more. The highest stock prices are paid for shares in corporations that show the highest return on investment. Spiritual goals my arse!

There is also Klein's general attack on media workers with phrases like 'brand managers envisioning themselves as sensitive culture makers'. Such stuff appeals to student radicals who have yet to work in industry and think everyone who earns more than \$50,000 a year is a middle class wanker. Only last week a young member of the Democratic Socialist Party actually edged her chair sideways away from me when I mentioned that I could help with publicity for a Socialist Alliance meeting because I had been an advertising copywriter for 25 years.

Blaming the symptoms does not cure the disease. The problem of gross inequality between the haves and the havenots in capitalist society was not created by brand managers, marketing managers and ad agency copywriters. They're just trying to earn a living doing what they do best:

playing around with words, pictures and music. All this creative energy is there to be redirected when the majority of people decide they have had enough of big business running society and want to set their own priorities. I have seen a glimpse of this whenever ad agency creatives are asked to come up with ads for social causes. One example was the US "Ads Against Aids Campaign" which I submitted an entry for and was called upon to judge. It attracted a huge response from copywriters and art directors in big, medium and small ad agencies across the States who worked nights and weekends for free.

Another weakness in the book is the implication that there are two kinds of capitalism: the capitalist enterprise that operates within the borders of a single nation state (good capitalism) and the business that's crossed one or more borders i.e. the multinational corporation (bad capitalism).

Jess Whyte of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) completely omitted to mention the implicit nationalism contained in *No Logo* when he wrote in *Socialist Worker Review* of May 2001) 'It is hard to imagine anyone reading *No Logo* and not wanting to do exactly that' (i.e. "smash the profit system"). On the contrary, I can well see One Nation supporters reading *No Logo* and saying "hooray for Dick Smith and his campaign to save Vegemite from the greedy multinationals".

Dick Smith is no better a boss than the chief executives of Kraft or General Foods. His sole interest is profit, the same as theirs is. If profits don't meet his target, Dick Smith will close his dinkum Aussie Vegemite factory and move production off shore.

Workers' Liberty supports the demands listed below which were developed by a group of workers and union delegates who met after the NSW Labour Council 'Sky Channel' stopwork which saw 200,000 rally across the State in favour of the Workers Comp campaign on 21 June.

Workers comp deficit?? There is no deficit – this is a cost shifting exercise from the bosses to workers. The widely reported \$2.1bn "deficit" is a *predicted* deficit over a period of 50 years!!

Through restructuring, speed-ups, cuts to staff, "efficiency savings" and increased workloads, workers are seeing a deterioration in safety standards and experiencing more stress in the workplace. Carr's Bill transfers the cost of injuries to workers and does nothing to improve workplace safety.

This meeting of union members and delegates supports the call for a Labor Party special conference on this matter. The 24 hour strike by Illawarra workers showed how to fight.

We demand that the Labor Council and affiliated unions:

- call mass delegates meetings in all major urban centres to consider the next step of the campaign
- restore the revenue collection bans on rail and buses
- call a 24 hour state wide strike immediately
- our unions to expel those members of parliament who are union members and crossed the Labor Council blockade.

We demand that:

- the government force employers to pay proper workers comp premiums –which the government admits will be worth over \$100m per year
- a government insurance fund for workers compensation be re-established and the private insurance market be excluded from this field
- the full inspectorate of WorkCover be restored to enforce workplace safety laws
- and that negligent employers be prosecuted on criminal charges

Join us! Pass this motion at your workplaces and bring signatures to the lobby of Labor Council on Thursday 5 July 6pm at Trades Hall, Goulburn St, and join the lobby outside the admin committee of the Labor Party on Friday 6 July from 4pm, 377 Sussex Street.

Workers' Comp *(continued from page 20)*

For unions to take the organisational step and disaffiliate from the ALP is not necessarily a forward step for the class. To be outside the party which unions established in order to give them political representation and in which unions still control 60% of the vote at policy making conferences is a big decision to take. The ALP is still the only party which avowedly claims to represent workers' interests which can realistically form a government. It would make sense to fight within the ALP and within the Labor Council for campaigns and policies which advance workers' interests. For instance the fight to hold a special ALP Conference to decide the issue could have been fought more vigorously and that fight is not over yet. Would those on the left who welcome union disaffiliation argue against the holding of a special conference on the Workers' Comp issue? To do so puts them in the same camp as the ALP right-wingers.

The General Secretary of the Public Service Association in an open email to delegates suggested that the PSA *should* affiliate to the ALP. He implied that the fight to defend Workers Comp would be strengthened from within the ALP. The impact of a 40,000 member union, nominally left-wing, could tip the balance of forces in the NSW ALP conferences. This would be opposed by the right-wing who now dominate. Unfortunately this is unlikely to be a serious move as the membership most likely would defeat affiliation – from a conservative, apolitical position.

The call for a special conference of the ALP on workers' compensation should be supported by all socialists. It is sectarian clinging to a shibboleth about the death of the ALP as part of the labour movement to refuse to support this call, and to counterpose disaffiliation.

The reason that the electricity industry in NSW is not privatised is precisely because the unions who opposed it managed to defeat Carr and Egan at a NSW ALP Conference. No small victory.

Workers' Comp 14 years ago

NSW Labor lost government after the 1987 workers' compensation amendments that it imposed, cutting workers' entitlements to reduce the cost of the scheme to employers.

South Coast Labor Council workers struck for 24 hours then too. Two key differences between 1987 and 1991 are that this time NSW Labor Council opposes the deal and has organised against it, whereas last time they helped to impose it. And last time there was a representative of the workers in parliament, George Petersen, member for Illawarra, who was expelled from the Labor Party for crossing the floor to vote against the legislation. It was partly because of George's stand that the South Coast workers took their decision to strike despite being isolated by the NSW Labor Council.

If the two sources of opposition were simultaneous - both the workers' representative in the Labor caucus, and NSW Labor Council organising workers action against the changes - then the mix would have much more explosive potential for radicalising the face of working-class politics in NSW, than either source of opposition has had by itself.

George Petersen did not appeal against his expulsion from the ALP, he said "because in my view, the ALP organisation is now so corrupt and bankrupt that such a move would not mobilise the mass of workers." (letter to *Socialist Fight*, August 1987). He went on to say, "It seems to me that the way forward is to organise the workers outside the ALP structure rather than pursuing the chimera of appealing against my expulsion. For that reason I am taking steps to form the Illawarra Labor Party (ILP), to be based upon a socialist program as a field

where socialists can work. Formation of such a party is feared by the ALP establishment. If we are successful we will certainly extend to other areas. We will just have to wait and see." Unfortunately the ILP was not a great success. George, even with his personal following and strong record of supporting workers in the Illawarra, did not get close to winning enough votes to be elected to parliament for the ILP.

The simplistic calls by the DSP to disaffiliate from the ALP, even with a socialist platform, do not provide a basis to transform the actually existing labour movement. The unions and their delegations to ALP conferences are not properly accountable to the workers they are supposed to represent. Accountability and democracy within the movement that has the loyalty of workers is an important part of changing working-class consciousness about politics. An organisational split with Labor in anger at an obvious betrayal is an empty gesture if it is not accompanied by a perspective of challenging the politics of accommodation to capital, and the lack of democracy and accountability within the labour movement. At present neither the Socialist Alliance nor its affiliated organisations hold the possibility of being an alternative government to the ALP or a pole of attraction for affiliation

What we said in 1987:

Socialist Fight wrote an open letter to George Petersen urging him to appeal against his expulsion from the ALP for breaking caucus and voting against ALP Premier Barrie Unsworth's reduction of workers' compensation entitlements. Here is an excerpt.

"The campaign to defend workers compensation is opposed by the NSW Labor Council, and has been carried out by union branches on the south Coast in isolation from their whole unions, even though many of them reject the legislation.

"You are helping to break down that isolation because you are in the largest forum of the labour movement, the ALP.

"You are in a position to help mount a campaign to tackle some of the central problems which the Australian working class faces in defending it self during these hard times. The working class needs unions and union leaders who are resolute in standing up for the interests of the rank and file, and not giving in to blackmail from Labor Governments. And the working class needs a party which can rule in its interests, not the interests of the profiteers behind the destruction of workers compensation.

"Union leaders are hiding behind the Labor Governments, when they should be standing up to them. Union leaders would have us believe that they can't do anything about Labor's attacks and sell-outs. Some talk of disaffiliation, others like the Miners don't even send delegates to conferences. But in combination the unions have hundreds of votes on ALP state conferences, on ALP committees, and union leaders even have votes in ALP factions. They could and they should insist that Labor defend the interests of the working class. Even a few union leaders prepared to do this now, could build enough support to win some important issues within the ALP relatively quickly.

"You could provide an opportunity for these union leaders to show where they stand by taking your expulsion to ALP state conference. Rank and file members of affiliated unions could invite you to address meetings to ask for them to pursue a policy of committing their unions to vote against your expulsion at next year's State Conference. Many ALP branches and bodies would vote to defend you, starting with the 3 who endorsed your stand in advance, Mount Kembla, Warrarong and

NSW

Young

Labor."

Workers' Liberty

Workers' Comp, unions and the ALP Fight for Workers' Comp

By Leon Parissi

The fight in NSW against the Carr government's slashing of workers' comp has led to unprecedented scenes such as the blockade/picket of Parliament House on 19 June. It might be hard for some to imagine a worse relationship existing between the organised workers' movement in NSW and 'its' ALP government.

The Australian on 21 June overstated the situation when claiming that:

"The union movement today began withdrawing support from the NSW branch of the ALP over the state government's push to reform the workers' compensation scheme."

This observation was prompted by the announcement that the NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU) would disaffiliate from the ALP. Many on the left hailed this as correct move. The example of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) of Great Britain is also cited. The FBU is incorrectly said to have disaffiliated from Britain's New Labour. In fact the FBU chose to use its political fund differently. Matt Wrack of the FBU and a Socialist Alliance supporter explains in a letter to the British Socialist Alliance Executive Committee:

"I believe that posing the question in terms of democratising the Political Funds can greatly strengthen a campaign on this issue. Democratising the funds means firstly that the union should no longer give unconditional support to Labour. This is an argument we can win with the rank and file. It is based on allowing the fullest debate within the union on the politics of the various organisations asking for support without pre-judging that debate. If Labour supporters want to argue for support for their candidates then so be it, as long as the same rights are granted equally to other working class organisations. In this way we can argue that politics within the union should become a real area of debate and discussion rather than simply a process of handing cheques over to Labour without any discussion with the members."

The FBU motion reads in part:

"Conference agrees that the Fire Brigades Union Political Fund will in future be used to support candidates and organisations whose policies are supportive of the policies and principles of this Union. This may include candidates and organisations who stand in opposition to New Labour so long as they uphold policies and principles in line with those of the Fire Brigades Union."



Unions picket NSW parliament

NSW Fire fighters

There have been many examples of union disaffiliation or withholding of affiliation fees in Australian labour history. Many of these fall into the category of bureaucratic posturing to the membership, of appearing to stand up to the latest 'sell out' ALP government. Often these same officials will maintain their own positions in the ALP hierarchy. This posturing reveals the real purpose of such manoeuvres. Many union officials are only interested in maintaining the well-worn path to parliamentary sinecure. A good example is Minister for Industrial Relations and chief architect of the government's Workers' Comp legislation, John Della Bosca, who hails from the same Labour Council that today he is doing battle against.

Over the Workers' Comp issue in NSW the Fire fighters have taken a stronger position from the FBU in Britain and said they will disaffiliate from the ALP. While this action does not appear to fall into the category of posturing according to the *Australian* newspaper on 21 June the real situation reveals a tactical consideration similar to their British comrades:

"NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union state secretary Darryl Snow said a meeting of firefighters had voted to disassociate the union from the NSW ALP until Premier Bob Carr was no longer at the helm.

"We will disassociate ourselves until such time that Bob Carr is no longer the parliamentary leader of the NSW branch of the Australian Labor Party," he said."

Some right-wingers in the ALP would welcome the end of union affiliation for they want to take the same road as Britain's New Labour and become US-style Democrats, an open party of business. A victory for such forces would be an enormous defeat for the working class. But the question remains for the fire fighters - where will they put their efforts at political representation?

(Continued on page 19)