

# Workers' Liberty

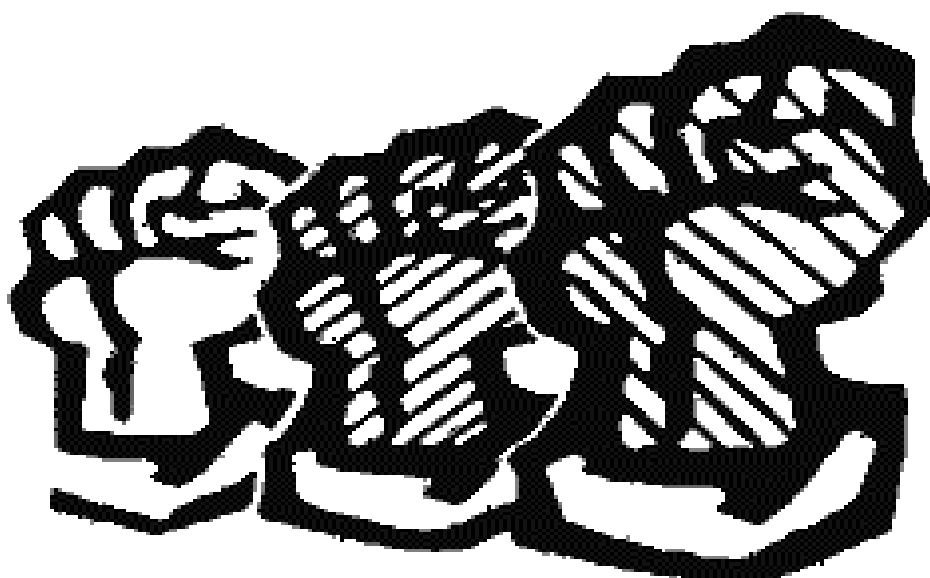


*The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself*

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## Australian Socialist Alliance off to a strong start

By Lynn Smith

**R**epresentatives from a number of left-wing parties and groups met in Sydney on Saturday February 11 at the invitation of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO). The purpose of the meeting was to see if enough common ground existed between the parties to come up with a policy platform. If agreed, the platform would be taken to public meetings where people would be asked to join and support a new political formation called the Socialist Alliance which would stand a number of candidates in the forthcoming federal election.

A number of policies proposed by the DSP and the ISO (e.g. shorter work week for no loss of pay, increase in public works, no state aid for wealthy private schools, no individual workplace agreements, repeal of all anti-trade union laws, scrapping the GST, increased support for Medicare and an end to public funding of private health services, introduction of a wealth tax as a first step towards the redistribution of income) were accepted without little dissent. Other policies were debated extensively. A Workers' Liberty amendment under the heading of "what kind of society do we want?" which recommended that the Socialist Alliance dissociate itself completely from the Stalinist regime of the former Soviet Union did not win broad agreement. However, another amendment we proposed i.e. that bankrupt industries not just be nationalised, but nationalised and placed under the control of the workers in those industries, did attract considerable support and a decision was deferred until there has been wider discussion. (Continued p3)

Inside:

- **Socialist Alliance Britain**
- **M1 - Anti capitalist, pro what?**
- **Queensland dairy farmers - allies of the working class?**
- **When women fought for liberation - an overview of the women's liberation ....and more.....**

## Where we stand

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

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

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

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

## Workers' Liberty publications

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# Australian Socialist Alliance (continued from p1)

An amendment proposed by the Workers' Power group that the police be disarmed and placed under community control to avoid repeats of the bashings and intimidation by police in last year's S11 blockade of the World Economic Forum at Melbourne's Crown Casino was discussed and subsequently agreed upon.

Much discussion took place on what relationship the Socialist Alliance should have to the Labor Party. Some delegates wanted preferences to go automatically to Labor. A small number wanted Alliance preferences to go to the Greens. Others wanted preferences to go to the Greens only if a given Greens candidate had a history of supporting working class struggles and the ALP candidate in that electorate did not. This last position was the one subsequently adopted.

There was a lot of talk about the demand to "disband the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank". Workers' Liberty argued that it was only valid to call for such capitalist outfits to be scrapped if we suggest something they should be replaced with e.g. cross-border solidarity between workers in struggle and the levelling-up of wages on a world scale. The position taken at the meeting by the ISO and the DSP (that "scrap the WTO etc" was a popular demand in the anti-capitalist movement and should stay in) was supported by most of the other groups present.

Workers' Liberty proposed that the Socialist Alliance openly agitate for a workers' government and stated that social priorities should be set by working people, not handed down from on high by the party elite purporting to speak for the working class. This was discussed and a decision deferred until the issue has been canvassed more widely.

As we go to press, the following left-wing parties and groups have agreed to participate in the formation of the Socialist Alliance:

Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)  
International Socialist Organisation (ISO)  
Workers' Liberty  
Workers' League  
Worker Communist Party of Iraq  
Workers Communist Party of Iran  
Progressive Labor Party (PLP)  
Freedom Socialist Party (FSP)  
Workers' Power

Left-wing parties and groups based in Melbourne — such as Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party (Militant) — and other capitals cities are also being approached to join in. We will publish a full list of participating organisations in our next issue. Workers' Liberty commends the DSP and the ISO for their initiative in trying to forge a measure of unity out of parties with considerable differences in their political and class orientations. So long as everyone is guaranteed full democratic rights and minority opinions can be aired and discussed, we believe this is a progressive step and may well lead to a strengthening of the independence and the confidence felt by workers during and after the next federal election.

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## A Voice for a workers' alternative

*In January the DSP invited a range of left groups and individuals to discuss the formation of a Socialist Alliance for the coming Federal election. Workers Liberty circulated a document A voice for a workers' alternative as the basis we propose for the Alliance. A meeting of representatives of a number of the groups was held in Sydney on February 17, to seek agreement on a statement for founding the Socialist Alliance. The next steps in forming the Alliance are apparently to circulate more widely the draft statement as discussed on February 17; to set up SA groups in major centres; and then to hold a national conference at which a platform and constitution for the Socialist Alliance can be adopted. The revised draft from the February meeting is not available as this is written. Even though a number of Workers Liberty's suggestions were incorporated on February 17, we intend to propose further amendments to make clear what socialism is, that program of the Alliance can only be won by workers' struggles, and for positive policies that would be part of a socialist program.*

**Workers' Liberty endorses the need to mobilise a collective voice for a workers' alternative to the current projects of capital and to both the direct political parties of capital, the Liberals and the Nationals, and the treacherous pro-capitalist leadership of the ALP. Accordingly we will join in enthusiastically in discussions around the DSP's proposal for a Socialist Alliance.**

**Obviously considerable discussion will be necessary to work out a common approach and identify how to deal with differences within the Socialist Alliance. Our initial ideas on policies and orientation to contribute to that discussion are along the following lines:...**

- **Advocate a socialist solution;**
- **Call for the renovation of the labour movement;**
- **Emphasise the need for working class struggle; and**
- **Call for a class-based vote, with preferences to the ALP or other workers' parties, not to the Democrats.**

**We are for the return of an ALP government, as long as the ALP remains the political expression of the trade unions, i.e. the overwhelming majority of the organised working class. Socialists who recognise socialism as the liberation of the working class by the working class must focus on the trade union movement. The discussions to form this alliance should address the following issues:**

1. **The policy platform.**
2. **The means by which these policies are to be achieved, and therefore to be campaigned around.**
3. **The decision-making processes of the Socialist Alliance, including adoption of policies,**

**endorsement of candidates, production of publicity and finances. . . .**

#### **Policy platform**

##### **Theme**

For a workers' plan to rebuild Australia - tax the rich, seize control from the profiteers, rebuild jobs, expand public services, create a democratic republic.

##### **In more detail**

We are for socialism - By socialism, we mean nothing like the old Soviet Union, but instead solidarity raised from a principle of resistance to the guiding principle of society. We mean the working class organising to liberate itself from the rule of profit and create its own democracy, abolishing the privileges of managers and officials. Every major industry should be reorganised on the lines of social provision for need - publicly-owned, and democratically controlled by workers and the community. No rich and no poor, no profits and no wage-slavery, no mansions and no homeless, no jobless and no overworked!

Our candidates' aim is to enhance working-class political representation by providing a voice in the elections for working-class people seeking to assert their class interests against both the direct political parties of capital, the Liberals and the Nationals, and the pro-capitalist leadership of the ALP.

Candidates will support all working-class struggles, and all the battles for liberation of the oppressed. If elected, they will take only a worker's wage. They will be workers' representatives on a worker's wage.

##### **Immediate issues**

##### **The right to organise and fight**

... Every worker should have the right to join a union and oblige their employer to recognise and negotiate with the union. Unions should have the right to gain access to workplaces, to inspect company plans and books, to strike, to picket effectively, and to act in solidarity with other unions or social causes. Repeal anti-union laws - the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45 D and E of the Trade Practices Act.

... Disarm the police, and bring them under democratic community control - to prevent police attacks such as those made at S11 and Richmond Secondary College in Melbourne.

##### **Economic equality**

... Tax the rich and slash the defence budget to fund free universal provision for health, education, and care of dependent people.

... End government funding of private schools, hospitals and health insurance.

... Repeal the GST and introduce a highly progressive progressive system of taxes on incomes, profits and wealth - reverse drastic reductions in business taxation of recent years.

##### **Jobs for all**

... Expand public services and cut the work week without loss of pay. Companies making large scale job cuts should be nationalised with minimum compensation and handed over to workers and community control;

... Fight globalised capital with global working-class solidarity, to gain union rights, basic public services, and a living wage for workers worldwide, and for a global plan of economic reconstruction at the expense of the rich as our alternative to the poverty-and-privatisation drives of the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and international banks.

##### **A sustainable future**

... Extend public transport

... Develop renewable energy and curtail greenhouse gas emissions

... Worker - community - green alliances to take control of production for human need and sustainability, not profit.

##### **Rights for all**

Recognise indigenous rights including native title

Free access to Australia for migrants

Sexual freedom and gender equality

No discrimination on the basis of race, sex, nationality, religion, age, disability or sexuality.

## **2. Achieving these policies**

Such policies can be achieved by determined working class and community struggles and solidarity. This means that the SA must relate to the existing labour movement. The unions still remain the major organisations of the working class, the major vehicles of class struggle even though they represent the working class incompletely, unsatisfactorily, binding the class to capitalism. That was particularly apparent in the 13 years of Labor government between 1983 and 1996, with the Accord between the unions and the ALP.

The Alliance may not agree on precisely how to fully achieve these policies, but it must place mass action and solidarity ahead of parliamentary methods, reliance on the courts, or protection for Australian capital.

2.2 Standing candidates for parliamentary election is only one means that we will use to reach a wider audience to build support for these policies.

2.3 SA will advocate a vote in parliamentary elections first for any endorsed SA candidates, as a general rule with second preferences to the ALP ahead of Greens and the Democrats. There may be some individual cases for allocating preferences to other left-socialist candidates before the ALP. The Coalition would be receive last or second last preferences to any One Nation or far right candidates.

2.4 SA should consider taking on extra-parliamentary methods, especially within the labour movement, from workplace levels upwards, such as proposing endorsement of the SA policy platform, forming of SA campaign committees, seeking responses from union leaders, ALP branches, candidates and activist groups to the policy platform. We should anticipate the possibility of running SA candidates for union office where there is no viable rank and file movement already campaigning. The SA should fight for unions to call the ALP to account.

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# Socialist Alliance in Britain

By Martin Thomas

**T**he activist-left electoral coalition organised in Britain under the "Socialist Alliance" banner has contributed two big things. It has brought most of the activist-left groups into joint activity, and some political dialogue and debate, for the first time in decades. And it has begun to construct something which gives class-conscious workers and young people a way to make their voices heard — by each other and by the Labour and trade union leaders — through the electoral arena.

The coalition has developed crabwise, by trial and error and successive approximations. That is no sin. Probably we could have advanced no other way. But what we have now in Britain is not an ideal, fully-worked-out scheme which should be an instant template for Australia or other countries.

To tell the story we must go back at least to the May 1997 general election. The Tories had ruled for 18 years — pulverising large sectors of trade-union strength (mining, docks, print); imposing ultra-restrictive laws against strikes and pickets; devastating public services; privatising huge swathes of industry; and turning many once-busy industrial areas into ghost towns. Most workers felt immense relief, and at least a spark of hope, when the Tories were finally voted out and replaced by a Labour government.

## Blair 'New Labour' government

That Labour government, however, was and is headed by Tony Blair. Blair had already announced and started on a programme of transforming the Labour Party into a firmly "pro-business" operation, something (so he said) like the US Democrats. Before the election Blair's lieutenants talked of using a Labour government to introduce state funding for political parties and cut Labour's trade union links altogether.

Blair has not gone that far. The union leaders, battered and demoralised after the 18 Tory years, have been so servile that he has seen no need to! Blair has transformed the Labour Party conference into something more like a trade fair; virtually banned political debate from it; shifted New Labour's financial base from one where the unions used to provide 90% of funds to one where they contribute only 30% and the other 70% comes mostly from well-off individuals and business donations; and stuffed the ranks of government advisers and task forces full of business people whom New Labour is courting. The laws against effective trade union action remain. Privatisation continues. Cutbacks in public services and benefits continue.

Two of the activist-left groups stood a few candidates in the 1997 general election: the Socialist Party (formerly "Militant", who operated as a deeply-immersed faction in the Labour Party until 1990), and Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Both got a couple of respectable results, but neither did well. They ran against each other in a number of areas. Their candidacies had little apparent perspective except to serve as a means for recruitment to their respective

organisations. Most of the activist left felt that the general rule still held true from previous decades — that separate left-party candidacies make little impact, and impede rather than aiding the advocacy of our ideas, because they "package" those ideas in a tactic seen as "letting the Tories in". (The British electoral system is first-past-the-post, with no facility to transfer preferences).

Once the Blair government was installed, however, and it became an actuality rather than a probability that the Labour Party structures were largely shut down and the union leaders would do nothing to disturb that, the debate shifted. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty in Britain came out in favour of independent left candidates on a platform of working class political representation. Others also started to rethink.

## New thinking needed

The impulse that started the processes leading to the current coalition came in 1998. Two left-wing Labour members of the European Parliament, Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, defied New Labour discipline, got themselves expelled, and spoke out strongly against Blair's politics and for the need to reassert socialist and working class ideas. New elections for the European Parliament were coming up in June 1999; they would include preferential voting; and the process of selecting Labour candidates was a flagrant stitch-up. Maybe the activist left could seize on the stir created by Coates and Kerr to make a showing.

Tentative discussions were organised in London. At first the main groups involved were only Workers' Liberty, the Socialist Party, and the Independent Labour Network — a grouping launched by Coates and Kerr. Then the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) joined in.

Although its real strength is only a fraction of the 9000 or so members it claims on paper, the SWP is easily the biggest of Britain's activist-left groups. Evidently the SWP felt it had to venture out onto the electoral field, or else see itself bypassed on its left by growing numbers of activists. It remembered its experience in the late 1970s, when it stood a few by-election candidates and not only scored badly, but also, much more unbearably, scored much worse than a much smaller group (the "Mandelite" IMG, forerunner of today's ISG) when the two ran head-to-head against each other in the same by-election.

To run in elections on their own and score worse than candidates of an alliance of smaller activist-left groups would damage the SWP's pretensions severely. In an apparently painful about-turn from over a decade of dismissing all other activist-left groups as insignificant "fleas", the SWP decided that they needed an alliance (and calculated, reasonably enough, that they had good chances of dominating that alliance).

A political platform was agreed and some meetings were held. But it was a false start. The Socialist Labour Party — the grouping organised by the miners' leader Arthur Scargill after his exit from the Labour Party in 1995 — had been approached to take part in the emerging alliance, but had refused. The SLP, by now, was extinct as an activist force; but it still had money and Scargill's name. It was going to stand a slate in London for the Euro-elections. The SWP withdrew from its alliance with the AWL, SP, and ILN, saying that it had decided to back the SLP instead, and the rest of

us concluded that we no longer had a basis to continue. The united-left slates which continued in other areas, notably the West Midlands, had little success.

Initial contacts had however been made. In 2000 they were renewed. Another exceptional opportunity to "try out" an activist-left coalition election slate presented itself. Blair's government had restored a form of local government to London, to replace the old Greater London Council abolished by the Tories in 1986. Elections were to be held for a mayor and a Greater London Assembly.

#### **'Red' Ken factor**

Again, selection of the official Labour candidates was a glaring stitch-up. Ken Livingstone, leader of the old GLC at the time of its abolition and now a leftist Labour MP, was the clear choice of the trade unions and London Labour Party members as mayoral candidate, but the top Labour leadership imposed a "loyalist" instead. Local Labour Party committees were allowed to select candidates for the GLA — but only after all left-wingers had been systematically and arbitrarily excluded from the lists of eligible choices.

We got together again. We used the umbrella of the Socialist Alliance. This was an attempted left regroupment which had existed for some years with a very limited life. In most areas it involved no-one much beyond the Socialist Party and scattered groups of unaffiliated activists. In Scotland it had been more successful — in a way. The Scottish Socialist Alliance had some electoral success, and has now gone forward to transform itself into the Scottish Socialist Party, with an ex-"Militant" majority but minorities from many other tendencies, including Workers' Liberty. However, the SPers in the Scottish Socialist Alliance had, in the process, broken away from the main body of the SP, towards politics very highly tintured with Scottish nationalism.

The Socialist Alliance had a legally-established electoral name, so we used it. The results in the London elections were not stunning, but they were encouraging. Local candidates scored as high as 7% of the poll (Cecilia Prosper in London North-East). Impressive public rallies of up to 2000 people were held. Hundreds of people — mostly left-wing ex-activists drawn back into political life, rather than completely new people, but valuable additions nonetheless — came round to the campaign to one extent or another. Frictions between the different groups — by now including the "Mandelite" ISG, the ex-Stalinist-but-now-quasi-Trotskyist Communist Party of Great Britain, Workers' Power, and others, as well as the AWL, SP, and SWP — existed but were containable.

That effort — and a series of by-elections — encouraged us sufficiently to plan a joint slate for the general election, and planning for that is now well under way. Around 65 candidates are planned across England and Wales, most of them already selected. These include Louise Christian, well-known as the lawyer for the families of the victims of the Paddington train crash, in Hornsey and Wood Green, and AWL members Janine Booth (Islington South) and Pete Radcliff (Nottingham East). Discussions are under way on a platform.

Local Socialist Alliances have been set up in London boroughs and a number of cities outside London. Their levels of activity vary, but the best have run campaign activity around many non-electoral issues, organised serious political debates in their meetings, and begun a serious and patient engagement with the local trade union movement.

Problems remain. The Socialist Alliances have as yet picked up few new young activists, and few of the many

Labour left activists angry at Blair's trajectory. The coalition is still more a marriage of convenience than based on a solid common understanding of what we are trying to say and do politically.

#### **Greater London SA**

The platform for the Greater London Authority elections contained in its conclusion a paragraph drafted by the AWL, summarising the ideas proposed by Workers' Liberty on what the Alliance should and must be about:

"By voting for the Socialist Alliance you can elect people to the Greater London Assembly who will speak up for workers, the jobless, pensioners and students, and against the bankers, the bosses and the profiteers. You can speak out against the way New Labour has abandoned many of those who elected it in 1997, in order to serve big business. And you can say you want a government that serves the working class as the Tories serve the rich".

There is still, however, a strong strand in the Alliance which sees such language as "too much about workers". The SWP has proposed the following preamble for the general election platform:

"The Socialist Alliance stands against the Tory policies carried out by the New Labour Government and which Labour proposes to continue if they are re-elected. We oppose the pro-business policies and the neo-liberal consensus across the major parties. This agenda is against the interests of the working class people who voted the Tories out and New Labour in May 1997. We stand for raising the confidence of working class people to take action to defend their interests. We stand for the establishment of a socialist world in which those who create the wealth in society, collectively own and control that wealth to plan production to meet need instead of profit on an environmentally sustainable basis".

This wording is a welcome shift from the SWP's previous orientation, which was to say that candidates were about presenting "a socialist alternative", but condemn as counterproductively abstruse theorising any effort to define this "socialism" or to anchor it closely to working class struggle. The SWP, however, has still not advanced very far beyond the idea that the purpose of electoral politics is to denounce the established parties, throw around a few leftist but hopefully popular demands, and count the recruits.

The Socialist Party started standing candidates, in the early 1990s, on the perspective that they, having just split from the Labour Party, would quickly become a new mass workers' party. In fact they have dwindled. They continue the same electoral tactic — and have got a few local councillors elected here and there — out of lack of perceived alternatives, rather than because they seriously still believe that their original perspective is valid. They are willing, grudgingly, to stand candidates under the Socialist Alliance banner, but insist strongly that these should be SP candidates, on SP politics, under SP control, whatever the rest of the Alliance locally or nationally thinks about it.

Resulting tension between the SWP and the SP has had, inadvertently, the effect of ensuring political space inside the Socialist Alliance for discussion and for input from the smaller groups. The fact that everyone is feeling their way probably also helps. To run the Australian Socialist Alliance by taking a blueprint from Britain, and then declaring it a done deal on the basis of private talks between the two biggest groups involved (DSP and ISO), is a way to reproduce all the weaknesses in the British Socialist Alliance but lose some of its strengths.

Visit: <http://www.socialistalternative.net/>

# Anti-capitalist, pro-what?

By Janet Burstall

The excitement of being in the waves of thousands on the streets of Melbourne last September, and feeling part of the world-wide flood of rebellion against the global power of capital, from Seattle, to Prague, to South America and India, have led the post-S11 activists in Australia to plan another day of action — May 1.

But what are we trying to achieve out there on the streets, and how many times over will people join in blockades and protests, without any particular goals and achievements other than the amassing of our numbers and obstruction of corporate boardroom targets? It is a tide that can turn back as rapidly as it came in. Disappointment can replace exhilaration.

The constant factor in conflict with capital — with the potential to overthrow it — is the class of people whom capital chooses to employ or not employ, the working class. To be effectively anti-capitalist means to be on the side of the working class. Workers' Liberty has been making the case that the post-S11 activists should be seeking to provide solidarity with workers' struggles against global corporations, to organise and work within and in support of union struggles. It is on the basis of their own struggles that the working class will be able to pose a positive alternative to the rule of capital, a socialist alternative of production democratically controlled for sustainability and human need.

After a brief hiatus, the DSP and Workers' Power put up a proposal to the post-S11 activist meetings that the next thing to do was to choose another big day, this time May 1. The initial call was for a global general strike, as if the workers of the world, or perhaps just Australia, could be lined

up behind the new movement to fight corporate globalisation. This would expose the weaknesses of the union leaders tied to the ALP who wouldn't support the global strike. Workers' Liberty argued in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and on email lists for an orientation to workers' struggles, and that the S11 becoming M1 groups did not have the authority to call out workers on a general strike. We were in thrall to the ALP officials, we were told by Peter Boyle of the DSP.

However, the "general strike", became a "global strike", then "strike" was dropped altogether. The ridiculousness of such posturing has forced the "global general strike" advocates to go silent, but not to admit that this was foolish sectarian bravado in the first place.

With M1 now being adopted in all the major cities, Workers' Liberty seeks to at least try to make the best of links with workers and unions through the effort to build it. It will require, above all, commitment and patience to make effective links. It will not be a quick shot of excitement with thousands on the streets together.

Is M1 and the anti-capitalist movement relevant to workers' and community struggles? It should be, but it has to be shown to be.

By targeting a series of corporate exploiters in the lead up to M1 we can broaden and concretise our message; get us out and active and attracting new people; and explain to workers and community activists that we are out to support them as well as calling on them to support our activities.

At clock-on time, we should be leafleting selected workplaces on the links between their issues, M1 concerns, and identifying their union.

## Unions and M1

By Janet Burstall

It is not simply a case of boldness that is needed to engage unionists in M1, by launching a call to then to join in. Trade Union liaison groups are being set up by some of the M1 Alliances, in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney, at least.

This is a welcome recognition of the reality by the M1 activists and committees that they do not have the authority to demand that workers line up behind unelected groups from outside the ranks of the union.

Peter Boyle of the DSP [m1-2k01 email list 12 Jan 2001] argued that Workers' Liberty underestimates the extent to which workers have lost faith in Labor, and "the significance of the new global movement", which mean that "this is a moment to be audacious and help build mobilisations that can draw in the advanced detachments of the working class and other oppressed classes." Earlier [12 Dec 2000] Peter Boyle had advocated the importance of a clear rallying point such as the stock exchange blockade "so that unionists who are forced to mobilise despite their officials have a clear and attractive rallying point."

The M1 Alliances should be approaching not only union officials but also activists to discuss the possibilities of unions calling action on M1. The Sydney union officials are particularly suspicious of the M1 activists. Union leaders were central in the Sydney S11 Coalition which banned the far left.

However, despite their frequent slowness to move, and despite the terrible record of many union leaders, the unions at rank and file level represent the major social force - organised workers - to which we must look if we're going to go beyond protests to really changing the world. To change the world, the unions need to be stirred up and revitalised, but that cannot be done by sending them demands that they line up behind us. Even the wretched union leaders are elected; we aren't. We cannot and should not take it upon ourselves to act as self-appointed authorities and leaders. We should be discussing with union activists what we can do together, in mutual support, rather than one-sidedly calling on them to follow our schedules and concerns.

The M1 Alliances should also be preparing to attend any union organised May Day activities on the following weekend, to show support and explain the connections between workers' concerns and the anti-capitalist movement.

The following leaflet, proposed by Workers' Liberty for M1 preparations, illustrates that it can be done.

# **M1: making the links - workers and the anti-capitalists**

## **Join us! Our cause is your cause.**

S11 - thousands rejected the right of global corporations to run the world and make decisions which shatter lives and the environment. Elected governments say they have to make unpopular decisions because of "globalisation" and "the market", as though these are magic forces. But "globalisation" and "the market" are the sum of decisions and demands made by the owners of corporations and the governments that support them.

Now there is a growing movement of global solidarity out to challenge this anti-democratic order of corporate domination. As we take to the streets we can work together for political and economic change that will put human need first in deciding what to produce, and which can sustain the environment.

The greatest power to challenge the global corporations lies in the hands of the people who are employed by them, the real producers of the goods and services, the food, housing and clothing, the computers, communication and transport systems, metals and plastics, fuel and energy. We are the people who do the work, and without us producing the goods and services, they would have nothing to trade and no profits to make.

So we have chosen May 1, the international day of workers, the real producers, to call for a global strike against global capital. We appeal to everyone with a job to raise a call for action in your workplace, and if you are a member, to raise it in your union. Every type of support will be valuable - motions of solidarity, donations, motions protecting individuals who wish to participate, union rallies on the day about the issues you face, strike action.

How often has something you disagree with been imposed on you or your community, at work, or elsewhere with the justification of "the market" or "globalisation"? Make the links, join us on May 1, and help to build the movement. There is action on these issues now:

### **Australian Workplace Agreements**

Peter Reith introduced AWAs to make the Australian workforce "more competitive" in the global market. "More competitive" means we can join the international race to the bottom on pay and conditions. In the frontline now, resisting AWAs are: BHP workers in Western Australia, represented by the Construction Mining and Forestry Union (CFMEU); Commonwealth Bank workers represented by the Financial Services Union (FSU).

### **Education on the ropes**

University students and staff know that funding has been cut and standards compromised in order to enforce corporate methods of decision-making in universities, to impress international financial markets with high credit ratings, and to attract full-fee paying students. Free education is education for equality and quality. The National Union of Students (NUS) and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) are campaigning on this. The CFMEU has offered some support.

### **Textile Clothing Footwear workers race to the bottom.**

As the TCF industry has globalised, production has moved to countries where labour is cheap and union organising is penalised, or to outworkers in Australia where it is hard to band together. Global solidarity amongst TCF workers and supporters can win union recognition and decent pay and conditions. Workers in Kukdong International factory in Mexico successfully returned to work on 19 February after being dismissed for fighting for their own union. The struggle continues in support of previously fired leaders being required to sign individual contracts. The Australian TCF Union's FairWear campaign, targets TCD companies to sign a code of conduct and work conditions.

Visit the Aus FairWear campaign web site: [http://vic.uca.org.au/fairwear/main\\_page.htm](http://vic.uca.org.au/fairwear/main_page.htm)

Visit the UK anti sweatshop campaign web site: <http://www.nosweat.org.uk>

Whenever, wherever in the world you hear of a company sacking workers, or refusing union rights, we can find out who owns the company, where it fits in the global web of ownership and production, and publicise the case to win support.

Gerard Henderson, the "thinking person's" right-wing commentator says of One Nation: "Yet, on a range of economic issues, including support for wide-ranging protection, the regulation of the financial sector and opposition to foreign investment, Hanson and her supporters are close to the policy positions of the leftist S11 protesters who rallied against globalisation on the Streets of Melbourne in September." (SMH 20 Feb 01) The policies Henderson attributes to the S11 protesters were only clearly spoken at S11 by some union leaders, notably Don Cameron of the Manufacturing Workers Union.



# Trade unions and anti-capitalism

## Mixing with the 'creme de la creme'

By Janet Burstall

"Every year trade union leaders discuss the question of whether or not we should go to Davos. It is always exciting to have access to the "creme de la creme" of the capitalist system which rules the entire world. ...For some time I have proposed establishing an alternative to Davos — not just an alternative, but a labour movement alternative to Davos. It is somewhat disappointing that we, in the trade union movement, have been unable to agree to take such an initiative... Trade unions with all their experience and pragmatism, provide the only realistic counterweight to unfettered capitalism. Consequently I welcome the Porto Alegre initiative - the alternative to the Davos World Economic Forum which is called the World Social Forum - to open up a debate about globalisation from a social perspective... We, in the trade union movement, must lend our support... There can only be one sensible conclusion: go to Porto Alegre." Marcello Malentacchi, International Metalworkers Federation [www.imfmetal.org/imf/main/main\\_text.cfm?show=opinions&id=839](http://www.imfmetal.org/imf/main/main_text.cfm?show=opinions&id=839)

The labour leaders who did go to Davos 2001 included Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Eight other top union officials attended, representing workers in India, Europe, Canada, Africa, the USA and via 2 international union bodies.\* Malentacchi's arguments are more pragmatic than socialist, but they point to the sharpening of the conflict between international capital on the one hand, and the working class and poor of the world on the other. The union leaders find it harder to carry on as before, seeking a seat at the table of the ruling class, enjoying the excitement of being amongst the rich and powerful. The World Social Forum may be eclectic and unclear about its relationship to capital, but at least the people who go there know that the global corporations are their common enemy. It would be even better if the unions did establish an open and democratic international labour movement alternative to Davos.

Sharan Burrow should be called to account — the workers seek no seat at the ceremonial tables of the ruling class. We may sit down to negotiate our demands, but that is all. When discussing how to shape the future of the world, our allies are the workers and the poor of the world. Union meetings should make it clear to the ACTU, no more union delegations to WEF meetings.

\*For which leaders went to Davos, and what they said there, see [www.gloabl-unions.org/davos.asp](http://www.gloabl-unions.org/davos.asp)

## Organise for solidarity

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

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

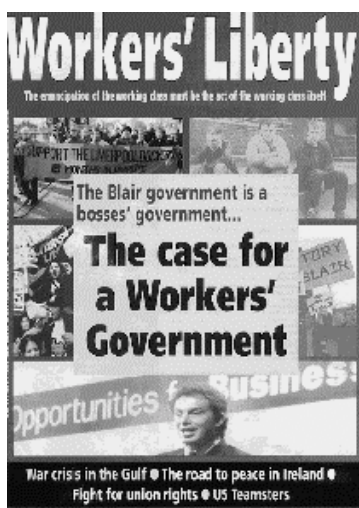
*Both newly-involved workers and long-time activists can learn immense amounts very quickly in big struggles. The struggle itself points us towards solidarity. But the all just be improvised on the hoof. And otherwise. Socialist organisation is **class** — as a structure which allows other's experiences. The class struggle has economics and politics, but also on the*

*There are many organisations view many of them could best be **united in democratic structure.** But that cannot be should the new activist do, in the face of*

*The same as you would do faced with a healing when you have a stubborn acupuncture, osteopathy, herbal medicine, they all get together on the question of check them out. The same goes with different organisations, carefully check basic Marxist theory, and see whether what say in words.*

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

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



*political ideas needed to win socialism cannot lessons will be un-learned unless we ensure necessary as **the memory of the working** activists to learn from history and from each to be fought not just on the fronts of terrain of ideas and theories.*

*proclaiming the goal of socialism. In our **a single organisation**, with an open, done overnight or at our behest. What, then, this often confusing variety of groups?*

*choice of schools, or of methods of sickness. Offered conventional treatment, or faith healing, you would not say: "Why don't cures?" You would investigate, read, and politics: **examine the programmes** of the what they say against 'common sense' and they do in practice corresponds to what they*

*working class left in a single organisation,*

# Critical sympathy for the Queensland dairy farmers

By Melissa White

The political backdrop to the recent agitation and the February demonstration by Queensland dairy farmers at Queensland Parliament House is the deregulation of the milk industry in July last year. Deregulation abandoned the old policy of price-setting and the system of payment of guaranteed subsidies to small-scale dairy farmers that protected them against the vicissitudes of competition. These dairy farmers formerly worked as independent producers. The small independent dairy farmers worked virtually as indentured sub-contractors for the major milk production companies such as Pauls. They sub-contracted in effect, because each farmer with small-scale land holdings was too small to supply the whole of any local market and so comprised but one productive cog in the wheel to the big companies supplying the market in its entirety. But the small farmers were happy with this arrangement insofar as it guaranteed their livelihood. The rationalization of the milk industry comes as a response to technical improvements and formal competition policy (that the Federal Government introduced as legislation) which free the large dairy companies from an outmoded form of production at the expense of the small farmers. Deregulation overcomes the prohibitive costs of national transportation of the basic product, so that excess milk supplies in any given region can be sold outside local markets. That is the rationale of the 'level playing field' as represented in competition policy.

Deregulation has had the effect of driving many small farmers completely out of business. In the last 6 months alone, the rate of ruination of NSW farmers has increased 4-fold, and the rate of ruination of Queensland farmers has more than doubled. This fact was well known in advance by the Federal Government, since a plan for compensation was implemented immediately upon deregulation in which those ruined were entitled to a pay-out from the Government within a specified 'honeymoon' period. This deadline has now been extended from February 19 to May 17 due to the concerted action by the farmers in the last few weeks and because of the Queensland state election.

There is no doubt that the militancy of the farmers has forced this concession of the extended deadline out of the Federal Government, worried by (the then) looming State elections in WA and Queensland, and by an upcoming Federal election. But this political reflex — periodic convulsions of the landed petite bourgeoisie — is something new on the Queensland political horizon. Queensland politics had been held to ransom by the landed petite bourgeoisie for almost 20 years under the National Party's Bjelke-Petersen State Government, who engineered a greater political weight for this group in electoral representation through gerrymander. What is 'new' here, however, is the seeking of political representation by the landed petite bourgeoisie in One Nation. There is a newly fractured Conservative vote and One Nation now occupies some of the terrain that the National Party once held by mass corruption and electoral gerrymander.

The manifestation of the political power of dairy farmers, an important group within production, is not the same kind of political power as that of the working class generally. It is the power of the small capitalist and the self-employed. It is the power of those who own their own means of production, and who seek — by special pleading when capitalist competition becomes tough, impersonal and international — to continue to do so. It is the power of those who seek the political support of workers only to the extent that they want 'unity' against big capital. It is the power of those who are themselves necessarily aspirant to become bigger capitalists, in order to be freed from the constant and grinding competitive pressures of being small capital, but who find themselves constrained by the fact that they are an historical throwback to an earlier and inefficient form of production. It is the power of those who in less adverse circumstances would have no qualm in exploiting those very same workers they now seek the support of. It is the power of those who would, because it is in their interests, support anti-union laws, and in fact *did* support anti-union laws during the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) waterfront dispute in 1998 by creating a fighting fund and political agitation for strike-breaking. Let's not forget that the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), that same lobby group that represents these farmers, established the scab stevedoring company, Producers and Consumers Stevedores (PCS), to work the docks and assist Peter Reith in smashing up the MUA. The struggling dairy farmers are now struggling because they are a remnant of an outmoded type of production, struggling because they own their own small means of production only by virtue of their ownership of their land, and struggling because they cannot compete with the large-scale and centralized production of the major milk companies. But the struggling farmers are no automatic friends of the worker, and it is a grievous error to see in them a cause that is the same as the cause of the worker or the labour movement generally.

Two scenarios emerge for the farmers affected by the new arrangements of production. Those immediately driven off their farms by ruination may throw their lot in with the big milk production companies and look for a livelihood there. In this case, formerly self-employed farmers end up as workers for the bigger milk production companies — this farmer is a proletarian in the making. Second, those farmers under a less immediate threat of ruin may band together to form a capitalist syndicate based on some sort of co-operative, a limited form of communal socialization of their means of production. Such banding together might offer a chance to effectively compete with massive companies such as Pauls and Dairy Farmers. But emergent farmers' syndicates are highly unlikely partly because of the 'tyranny of distance' between the major milk production states in Queensland and Victoria. Banding together is more likely to take the form of a temporary alliance, the farmers searching for political representation for their cause and seeking special legislation against the big landowners and milk production companies. These farmers would have the big landholders and milk production companies specially taxed by virtue of their greater productive capacity, justified on the grounds of the 'unfairness' of unfettered competition to the petit bourgeois,

in a system that protects their outmoded ways and their 'fair share' in the cake of capital. Those threatened by ruination will now seek a political expression to their grievances in a movement that institutes a system of re-regulation based on a protectionism of the small landowner from the big landowner and big production companies.

### Misplaced Sympathies

Two groups have put their hands up for this latter political solution to the ruination. One Nation from the Right, and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) from the Left. One Nation offers the farmers what they want: a protectionist racket for small business against big business based on a reactionary anti-globalization movement and a deep-seated Australian nationalism. In fact, One Nation's right-wing populism emanates from this very nationalism and a sentimental resistance to productive improvements in the industry, rather than any fascist sentiment that yet exists in that party. It would be difficult at this stage for any fascist grouping to ally itself to One Nation, since One Nation is still capable of recruiting a small amount of disaffected workers who protest against the Labor Party at the ballot box, although it is true that workers constitute the minority of support for One Nation. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate that possibility if at a later stage One Nation is cut adrift from the electoral support of a small rump of demoralized workers who protest abstractly by voting One Nation instead of protesting concretely through the collective power of the trade union movement. That, combined with the emergence of a genuine socialist threat, and a far-right movement that seeks extra-parliamentary means for its politics, could allow One Nation to hold the fascist mantle. We must keep close watch. The DSP, on the other hand, has decided to make overtures to the dairy farmers, not as potential proletarians, but by championing the cause of "re-regulation" from the Left. Indeed, the DSP is politically opposed to deregulation generally, but in order to make the case against it here has been forced to characterize deregulation as the source of evil because it is that brave new policy from which the milk processing companies and the supermarket chains are "profiteering". Apart from the fact that the whole capitalist mode of production is that of the "profiteering" of the capitalist class, this argument fails since price-setting is itself just another form of "profiteering" of the petit bourgeois against the big capitalist and the worker. The DSP has failed to distinguish how the "profiteering" of small capital is different — and yet they go even further by claiming that it is *preferable* — to the form of "profiteering" of big capital. The artificial construction of price for the purpose of guaranteed sale in the old system of price-setting is simply "profiteering" that does not speak its name. To construct the problem as one of "blatant profiteering" simply lends critical support to a preferential treatment of the little capitalists — who only takes their 'fair share', who are not 'greedy' — and so lose one's bearings from the liberatory capacity of the Australian working class to eliminate "profiteering" of any sort whatsoever.

What of the claim implicit in this DSP view that sympathizes with the dairy farmers as if they were a "progressive element" of the bourgeoisie? Apart from the fact that it is just as a matter of historical fact impossible to construe the landed petite bourgeoisie as a "progressive element" of the bourgeoisie since it, historically, has the highest and most consistent demographic of conservative voters — in fact big capitalists are far more "progressive" in the sense that they are better able to weather ruinous competition and so more often make concessions to their

workers — the DSP's politics of seeking socialist alliances with the "progressive" bourgeoisie is poisonous to working class interests. The farmers' militancy in the last few weeks might be "progressive" relative to a labour movement that is hard to move to industrial action despite being relentlessly attacked by both Labor and Coalition Governments, but it is in no way "progressive" in winning reforms that would benefit workers, let alone advance class struggle out of its present hibernation. It is a political mistake to equate militancy with "progressiveness".

Proportions guarded here, the One Nation placards in visible evidence at the farmers' demonstration in Brisbane were apparently insufficient to make this point clear to the DSP or to encourage it to distance itself from politically supporting this movement. The Green Left Weekly no.436 p.3 editorial states that:

"Only an alliance between small dairy farmers and the big majority of ordinary consumers — the urban working class — would have the social weight to counter the domination of industry policy by the big corporations. Such an alliance will not be possible as long as trade unions, the only existing mass organisations of the working class, remain tied to and politically subordinate to the pro-capitalist Labor Party politicians and union officials."

So, in the DSP world, the unions cop the blame for the DSP's bankrupt resurrection of popular front politics. The DSP galvanizes the support of its queasier cadres, rightly scared by the One Nation presence, for levelling the blame at the trade unions — institutions representing an entirely different class — by arguing that the farmers are part of the rural working class, no different from the "urban working class". The farmers — part of the 'working people' as the DSP comrades pointed out in M1 meetings in Brisbane when the political argument on this topic was had — are really part of the solution rather than part of the problem. In labelling the farmers as 'the working people', the DSP justifies supporting the protection of small capital via a Left populism that is greatly in evidence in its recent publications.

### Break the enchantment with the Petite Bourgeoisie as source of socialist hope

Who are "the people"? Multi-billionaire capitalists are "people". Indeed, farmers are working people, but the DSP is blurring this with the working class. What the DSP could actually mean is this: a highly-paid and unionized worker might be financially better off and more comfortable than a lowly-paid and struggling farmer, and the political point is that possibly the DSP thinks adversity is a politicizing force in itself. How? According to the DSP, it would be the class *proximity* of the petite bourgeoisie to the working class — the fact that at any minute it might be flung into the ranks of the working class — that makes it a natural ally of the workers. Quite the contrary. It is precisely this proximity that makes the petit bourgeois often more vicious, avaricious, and politically conservative at some moments than big bosses can be. This is certainly not to exonerate big capitalists and *nor* is it to say that small capitalists cannot be pulled in behind the socialist programme by a resurgent working class, especially when that working class has victory in its grasp such as occurred in the 1917 Russian Revolution. The measures of struggle that the DSP seems to use here —

how much the petit bourgeois earns in take-home pay, how hard the petit bourgeois works, the limited capacity of small farmers to become bosses and so to exploit workers — are not measures of working class sympathies, despite the romanticisation of "toil" that makes the comparison possible for them in the first place. Indeed, farmers are "toilers", but the obfuscation of the class interests that grants the small capitalist an 'equal right to a share of capital' denies the historical truth. The only times when the small capitalists have been able to form their own sets of demands and political programme, they have been unreservedly anti-working class and undemocratic. This is made clear by the petit bourgeois fascist movements in France, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the petit bourgeois ruling classes in less-developed capitalist countries like Indonesia, who, too weak to preserve their rule by consent, resort to military dictatorships.

Unlike the popular frontist stand of the DSP, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) have adopted an expedient and casual approach in the debate about socialists making links with the dairy farmers: an enemy's enemy is a friend to the ISO. The ISO stand content for the time being to see in the dairy farmers an oppositional force challenging, in whatever vague way, the "Liberals". The politics are to be clarified later. Whilst this might keep the ISO's options open to make recruitments from the "mood" represented in the "anger" of the farmers, it cannot be regarded as serious politics. As recently as September 2000 the landed petite bourgeoisie in England was able to effect an incredible mobilization of its ranks and various sympathizers in the fuel blockades under the aegis of a great "people's crusade" (see Workers' Liberty magazine 66, p.5). Neither the ISO nor DSP

seem aware that that "people's crusade" in fact disoriented some socialists to such an extent that they took it as the first oppositional movement against the Tony Blair's "New Labour" Party and as substitute for trade union action. Indeed, that mobilization was "oppositional" in the sense that those opposed to the high cost of fuel are not just drawn solely from the ranks of the Tories or their supporters. Workers are also affected by costly fuel. But the solution to the expensive price of fuel must not be assessed against the desiderata of "consumers", but against the socialist programme for working class emancipation. This includes criteria such as the real value of fuel in its production off the backs of the fuel and transport workers; a heavily graduated system of taxation at the expense of the rich; and massive improvements to public transport that serve public interests and reverse environmental destruction wrought by the indefinite burning of fossil fuels as a consequence of the fact that there is no rational planning for the use of the world's energy in the long term.

The British example compels us not to underestimate the social lobby power or militancy of the small capitalist. On the issue of the dairy farmers in Queensland, Workers' Liberty is not content to lie back and think of England with any socialist fondness. The dairy farmers are no substitute — not temporarily, not ever — for a working class socialist solution in which the major milk production companies are nationalized and the small farmers encouraged to come out in favour of nationalization by abandoning their outmoded methods of production for the most technically advanced methods available, and employed in a nationalized industry with decent working conditions.

#### **Students—Teachers—Building Workers for Public Education**

Mark McBride, a CFMEU member, lost 2 hours pay to support a protest against the corporatisation of university education, in Sydney on Monday 19 February. He told the SMH, "They're pricing education out of the normal person's range. Education should be free, not for the select few." The protest was outside a conference "Designing, launching and managing a corporate university." Delegates from global corporations such as IBM, McDonalds and Ford were held up by students blockading, whilst CFMEU members formed a barrier between students on one side, and police and security on the other. The Global Justice Coalition, students and more CFMEU members rallied on the footpath outside. The National Union of Students (NUS) and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) were also represented. Plans are underway for a national day of action on higher education on April 5, and the NTEU is expected to run a campaign in marginal seats in the federal election.

## **One Nation versus globalisation**

By Janet Burstall

Ten percent of WA voters voted for racism, xenophobia, protectionism and Australian economic nationalism on February 10, followed by 9% of Queensland voters a week later. In the seats they contested in Queensland, the average One Nation vote was 22%. This is not just the redneck element from a conservative state with small metropolitan and industrial centres. In a NSW by-election in a working class seat a week earlier, the racist vote was nearly 20% in the combined results of One Nation and the Australians Against Further Immigration party. A study of the 1996 election results found that of One Nation voters, 54% had switched from the Coalition, 23% from Labor and 14% from independents.

Australian economic nationalism of a more benign and contradictory type is expressed by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) Fair Trade Campaign, endorsed by the ACTU Congress last year. It expresses support for workers in other countries, but its main demands are for protection of Australian jobs against cheap imports. It shares one of the premises of One Nation: that Australians (workers) can save their own jobs in alliance with Australian capital. It does not take an independent working class perspective.

The S11/M1 campaigns against global corporations and for global solidarity have not accepted the need to try to connect the issues obviously confronting Australian workers with the anti-capitalist mood of the activists. The DSP argues that the activists' mood is directed against the big symbols, the WTO, World Bank, etc, so that it *why* M1 should focus on the Stock Exchange as a blockade target. The repeated holding of protests on big 'name days', will not enable the radical activists to make the links with workers to win victories against capital and forge solidarity. Only a strong working class movement can counter the effect of One Nation's appeal to petit bourgeois nationalism and racism.

Big anti-corporate protest demonstrations are not tackling the core issues in helping the labour movement to create an alternative to Australian nationalism which can fend off the growth of One Nation.

De-Anne Kelly, National Party Queensland, is keen to swap preferences with One Nation. "I hold, within Dawson, the only State seat that twice returned a communist. There are still darling old miners up there who used to be members of the Communist Party. Yet when they start yacking at the bar, I go Right and they go Left, and we meet around the back of the beer glass. So many of the concerns are common." (SMH 17 Feb 01)

## Letter to the editor

Janet,

Until recently I also held the view that groups to the left of the ALP should preference the ALP in elections. Regrettably, this really doesn't make sense anymore. I am sending you the text of a letter that I recently submitted to some newspapers which aims to change the tactic of voting altogether. My view is put the major parties LAST, both of them. If you feel slightly more inclined to support the ALP place them above the Coalition but not higher than that. The two-party system is *the* problem in the way of any meaningful reform. Nothing will change, certainly not in a socialist direction, until we have Proportional Representation and that will only happen when the major parties are reduced to minor parties in the parliament or wiped out completely. Only voters can do that by understanding how they can use their precious right to vote them both OUT, not IN. Here is the text of the letter which probably, and for understandable reasons of continued corporate domination, is unlikely to be published. VOTERS UNITE AND REVOLT! It is reported that the level of corporate financial support for the federal election is now higher for the ALP than that for the Liberal Party. This demonstrates that the ALP cannot claim to represent the working class or the unions anymore. It cannot even claim to represent the middle income earners who have suffered as much under the ALP as under the Coalition. The local and foreign corporate sector is firmly in control of the political direction of this country. Most Australians surely resent this situation deeply and want to change it but the electoral system favours the major parties. The minor parties and Independents, starved of both funds and publicity, are rarely a serious threat to the major parties. When they are legislation is passed, as in New South Wales in November 1999, to make it impossible to compete next time. The solution for voters is not difficult though. They can simply place their preferred "minor" parties and Independents first and both the major parties last on their ballot paper - an inherent democratic right still available. The time has come for a voter revolt to end de facto one-party corporate state. Let the campaign begin Australia! Vote the major parties down. Let's get some really interesting people in our national Parliament. The dreary charade of the two-party tyranny has lasted long enough.

Klaas Woldring,

# Breaking Chains

By Riki Revolutskaya

## Political Pride

Queer radicals, unionists and feminist activists had a big impact on Melbourne's Pride March. Over a hundred people joined the contingent sponsored by QUEER, UNITE, Radical Women and the Feminist Avengers.

It was easily the loudest, one of the largest and definitely the most political part of the march. Supporters heckled the Liberal contingent about their anti-worker and anti-queer policies and actions. We chanted for liberation, not the pink dollar.

We have copped some flak because some of our contingent verbally heckled the GALPEN (Gay and Lesbian Police Employees Network) contingent. QUEER issued a statement in answer. It said, in part:

"Many of our contingent were at the S11 demonstration and saw, or were on the bloody end of, the police savagery. It is hard for people who were not there to understand the deep scars on the psyche (let alone the body) that this has created.

"None of those beaten can strike back. The police have a monopoly on the right to legally use violence. So the anger becomes internalized unless an outlet can be found. The GALPEN contingent provided one such outlet for this completely justified anger to be verbally expressed.

"The police actions at S11 were only an extreme example of the main role they play in society generally — the defence of private property. The police are not workers like any others. Although they are employees who have only their

ability to work to sell, they have a direct role in attacking organised workers. They are routinely used to break workers' picket lines.

"When we need police — when violence against women, queers, koories is happening — they are almost always "too busy" to respond in time. Domestic violence, rape, queer bashings, racist bashings — these are all put in the too-hard basket. Queers are often treated with contempt.

"Worse than that, police have often acted with violence against queers and other oppressed people — bashings of queers, koories, young people and women continue.

"Attempts to have functioning queer community-police liaison committees have foundered over the years as the police hierarchy has not taken the issues seriously.

"QUEER recognizes that GALPEN members have challenged the homophobic and sexist institution for which they work. We know that their members have been victimized for standing up for the rights of queer police and for being open about their sexuality. We support the rights of queer police to organise. We recognize that marching at Pride is an important public statement for GALPEN members.

"We ask for recognition that QUEER supporters who were at S11 also had an important statement to make about the role of the police."

I think it was a mistake to target GALPEN. They were not marching on behalf of the police force — but instead

with the grudging tolerance of the hierarchy. If we are ever to actually make a revolution happen, the armed forces will have to be split. That is much harder to do with the cops than with the military, because of the direct role that cops have in suppressing working class struggle. But we still want to split the cops. People in GALPEN, are amongst the few police who may actually be prepared to listen to us at the moment. To heckle them is an example of simplistic politics and an inability to think strategically.

### **Straight identity politics?**

A recent issue of Socialist Alternative magazine carried an article polemicising against autonomous queer organising by groups like QUEER and QUACE (Queers Against Corporate Exploitation, in Brisbane). They propose a "united political campaign against homophobia" as a better option.

This seems to entirely miss the point. It is not just organising *against* homophobia that is important, but organising *for* liberation. Groups like QUEER don't ask for proof of your queerness before they let you in (unlike some of the early Gay Liberation conferences, where people were asked to affirm that they had had same sex action in the last six months!)

There is a group identity of queer. Anyone who is so attached to their individual straight identity that they cannot bear to participate has a real problem.

In all the discussion about the problems of identity politics, it always seems to be the dissident identities that are highlighted. The much bigger problem in society is the dominance of a conservative, nationalist, straight identity that confines people's sexuality and gender expression to narrow boxes.

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## **Our history:**

# **When Women Fought for Liberation**

By Cathy Nugent

*The women's movement was born anti-capitalist and involved many socialist women who, in their energetic debates, attempted to create a radical critique which put the oppression of women centre stage. This article was written in the UK in 1998.*

Following the events of May in France, the biggest general strike in history, taking its inspiration from the bitter and explosive rebellion of black people in the USA, it had its roots in the students' movement and the struggle against the Vietnam war. What revolutionary movement was this? The women's liberation movement!

The struggles of 1968 came to represent for the militants of the day an irrepressible, kick-ass fighting attitude against capitalism and against all forms of oppression. The youthful desire of 1968 to smash the old order and replace it with something more human was to be a continual reference point for the women's liberation movement as well.

Looking back in 1979 Sheila Rowbottom described the galvanising effect of '68: "The energy which erupted in May 1968 was overwhelming. You could catch a glimpse of that extraordinary concentrated force of people's power to dissolve constraining structures which must be the subjective experience of a revolutionary process... Nothing seemed impossible... Capitalism was seen as claiming your whole being. We were all colonised and had to become total resisters. The focus was not only on production or even on a wider concept of class struggle but on oppression in everyday life - particularly the family and consumption."

The new women's movement was born anti-capitalist and involved many socialist women who, in their energetic debates, attempted to create a radical critique of capitalism and bourgeois existence which put the oppression of women centre stage. They were rediscovering, recreating and reassessing the old, rich literature of the early Marxist movement on the "Woman Question". They also attempted to go beyond it.

"Women's Lib" was a creative movement with a lasting impact. The original goals of the movement were only half won - we have a legal right to equal pay with men but are still low-paid - or not won at all, such as 24 hour nurseries under community control. Nonetheless a social revolution did take place. Women are much more sexually free for instance.

### **Half a revolution**

The women's revolution was only half a revolution, and it was never a world-wide revolution: although a few women

may walk on the moon, millions of us still can't go out of our homes without having to cover our bodies from head to foot. Women were not affected equally by the revolution. Class and race continues to obstruct female emancipation.

These issues were discussed in the women's movement - at the level of theory at least. How to combine the categories of class and sex was the theoretical conundrum. The socialist feminist current made some progress towards

constructing an integrated revolutionary theory. However by the end of the '70s this debate became arid, convoluted and confined to the breeze-block buildings of Britain's new universities. Yet the issues remain very relevant. It wasn't all theory in the beginning: it was much more about picketing, poster, graffiti-ing, marching and fighting the police at the Miss World contest. And it wasn't just a middle class movement of ex-student women. In the UK a fight in 1968 by fishermen's wives to improve the safety on trawlers showed working class women campaigning publicly and provided initial inspiration to the women's movement. It was only the latest, modern example of working class women fighting for their communities, in solidarity with men. Such a class struggle was seen again with Women Against Pit Closures and more recently with Women on the Waterfront.

A more important struggle of 1968 came from sewing machinists at Ford's in Dagenham, striking for equal pay. Equal pay became the first demand of the broader women's movement. The modern women's movement was also impelled by social changes affecting working class women. From the end of the 1960s more and more women began to come into the workplace, a trend which will - all things being equal - continue into the next century. The experience made women more economically independent, brought them out of the isolated world of the "married home" and into the social world where they could shake off the constrictions of a life centred purely on family and private relationships. It helped women to recognise their own oppression. To a degree this has always been so.

At the end of the last century when women clattered down the Lancashire streets, on their way home from working at the textile factories, laughing at the men they worked with, with money in their pockets, confident and

carefree, they may not have automatically recognised their own oppression. But, for some, it was natural to want more equality and to join the women's suffrage movement. They may also have joined unions or even parties like the Independent Labour Party. The battles for class and sex equality have often coincided. So it was with the modern women's movement, with its origins in the social changes and anti-capitalist struggles of the late '60s. Yet by the end of the 1970s the radical and cultural feminists, for whom male dominance was the primary motor of history, had become the mainstream feminists. So much so that Andrea Dworkin was feted by the likes of Ken Livingstone and other leftists when she came to town. What, then, happened to the socialist feminists? A number of political pressures and problems combined to ensure their eclipse. The American socialist feminists were influential. Although what they had to say was as interesting as their European sisters, their conception of socialism was more often influenced by Stalinism, Maoism, and the Marxism and professional sociology of academia. The combination of feminists with such a political background and the influence on European feminism of the quasi-Stalinism and Maoism of post-Trotsky Trotskyism and groups like Big Flame ["libertarian" Maoists] was lethal.

### **Marxists & feminists today**

Most Marxists, socialists and Trotskyists of the '60s and the socialist feminists of the '70s were not able to get to grips with what was happening to the working class - in particular how the class would relate to the existing workers' parties, be that social democracy or the Communist Parties. Some Trotskyists looked for substitute revolutionary vanguards - the Maoists, the students etc. For some socialist feminists the vanguard was women. For instance Barbara Ehrenreich - an American socialist feminist - conflated the political and organisational defeat of the North American working class with the subjugation of women. She argued that this working class has been "atomised" and women as keepers of, tenders of, private existence have been central to this process: "Autonomy and creativity can only be expressed through our choice of furniture, or clothes or cigarettes." This may be a reasonable description of modern life but it takes no account of the responsibility of the workers' leaders for the defeated state of the class, its "atomisation" and apathy. Instead of a strategy which aimed to transform the labour movement and make it fight for women's rights, the women's movement, Ehrenreich said, will be a new vanguard which can rebuild a class movement. Such ideas pushed in the direction of putting male and female struggles against capitalism into separate categories. In the UK there was a continual ambiguity about how distinct socialist feminism should be as a political tendency on the left. Should it be a movement of women in socialist organisations? If the rest of the left was so sexist why not compete against it? Was socialist feminism to be an integral, caucusing, autonomous part of the left? The discussion was complicated by the various confused attitudes of the left organisations. At one end of the spectrum of confusion was Militant, who only "discovered" feminism about the same time they left the Labour Party, in the 1990s! At the other end of the spectrum were the International Marxist Group (IMG) who, to their credit, were at least involved in the movement from the start. They had a women's paper - Socialist Woman - which, though it may have covered socialist feminist debate, appeared to have no political life independent of the socialist feminist current.

Then there was the hot/cold, sectarian/opportunist attitude of the International Socialists. Individual women in IS were involved but it was not until the mid-'70s that their group saw the movement as anything connected to "real struggle". Eventually the IS, (by then the Socialist Workers' Party) started their own paper, Women's Voice, which set up discussion groups with independent life. At this point the SWP shut down Women's Voice. Clearly it was becoming unreliable at what it was set up for - to be a recruiting front. There is a more simple explanation for the problems the socialist feminist movement had in trying to establish a collective identity. They were under pressure from both sides. It's not very pleasant being called a "bloody feminist", "precious", etc., etc., from out-of-date lefties. But it's more annoying to be described as - words to this effect - a bimbo from the "male dominated socialist movement" who can't think for herself and has been brain-washed by those nasty Leninists. It was a bit rich when members of the Communist Party (!) in alliance with a group of radical feminists pushed that line against female Workers' Liberty supporters in the student movement at the end of the 1980s. But by that point the chances and opportunities were over for socialist feminism to develop as a strong and coherent political current with which the revolutionary socialist left could have made a healthy united front. Workers' Liberty's forerunners tried to work out a way of being Trotskyists, working class socialists - to intervene sensitively in the movement but at the same time forthrightly. We got involved in National Abortion Campaign and the campaign around the Working Women's Charter, but it took a long time to think of a way to take the initiative. In March 1982 we did initiate a conference - Fightback for Women's Rights. Bringing together 500 women, including single issue equality campaigns such as NAC and Women's Aid, and focusing on the rights of working class women it was an attempt to lay the basis for mass campaigning work under the new Tory government and to find the links between the goals and aspirations of socialist feminists and the needs and demands of working-class women. The conference came at a time when many socialist feminists were changing direction and were joining the Labour Party in order to be part of a struggle for democracy and political regeneration inside the political wing of the labour movement. From this point on the fate of socialist feminism is more closely bound up with the history of the left both inside and outside the Labour Party. For a time the struggles of socialist feminists in the Labour Party women's sections looked like being crucial in the battle to regenerate the labour movement. The women's sections were often more radical than the mainstream of the party - they opposed the Falklands War for instance. Organisations like the Women's Action Committee argued for greater representation for Labour Party women but their strategy foundered when the leadership of WAC chose not to link up with the fight to get Labour's leaders to oppose the Tory cuts.

When much of the left - Ken Livingstone when he was leader of the GLC for instance - backtracked from the fight against restrictions on local government spending, the consequences were damaging for the cause of socialist feminism. Money for community projects to help the oppressed - women, black people, lesbians and gays - became the hallmark of GLC "radicalism". Fighting the Tories fell off the agenda. Some socialist feminists, along with much of the Labour left, fell in with the strategy of putting off the fight - they raised the rates, they introduced the "dented shield" [policy of making "selective" cuts now while "holding out" for a Labour government], they implemented the poll tax. Suddenly there was no longer any women's centres. Finally



International Women's Week became an aromatherapy/reflexology fest.

Leading socialist feminist, Hilary Wainwright, went off to help found the Socialist Movement - an amorphous movement, founded in the wake of Kinnock's counterrevolution in the Labour Party, whose members were all committed to "socialism" but were not invited to debate how to achieve socialism. There was nothing inevitable about the retreat of the left or socialist feminism. When the women from the mining communities started to organise themselves as a powerful battalion in the strike the left in the Labour Party, its sisters too, rallied round. It was a fantastic example of working class women organising and could have given socialist feminism a reason for existence for many years to come. The strike was defeated, and it was not to be. While it lasted the socialist feminist current in the women's movement was a genuine attempt to rethink and to rediscover a socialist past. So many questions...

What is the role of the family under capitalism? Did women's labour in the family constitute productive labour? What could we learn from the experience of the Russian Revolution? Could we socialise housework and childcare? What would the family have looked like under socialism? From Kollontai [Alexandra; leading Bolshevik who eventually capitulated to Stalin] the socialist feminists claimed the idea that revolutionary transformation included all aspects of human existence. After the revolution personal relationships would be more equal and humane. The issues surrounding Kollontai's writing were discussed. How can we take these ideas as prescriptions for the future if they have emerged from an historical experience that was flawed and difficult.

### Utopian instincts

Socialist feminists had to confront their own utopian instincts. The personal and emotional aspects of the women's movement were difficult to deal with. Over-concern with issues of psychological health risked charges of middle-class life-stylism. A lack of concern with what oppression feels like was a point of agitation against the Marxist organisations - and a reasonable point of agitation no doubt when socialist men felt they could call you "girl" or "love" and get away with it. Some feminists, such as Juliet Mitchell and Lynne Segal, used a psychoanalytical framework as a source of intellectual ideas for socialist feminism. Reich, who most clearly linked societal exploitation and oppression with repression, was rediscovered by the left. The concept of repression as a controlling mechanism in the construction of female sexuality was popular. The debate on sexuality was a response to the radical feminists. In the mid-'70s the national conference of the women's liberation movement had adopted a new demand - the "right of women to a self-defined sexuality". For radical feminists the idea of a freely chosen sexuality (if such a thing is possible) could be skewed to mean that only a sexuality freely chosen as lesbian, and strictly separate from men, was liberating. The socialist feminists made a defensive response.

Another issue was how ideological sexism related to economic life, to production. A sometimes Stalinist distortion of Marxist political economy obscured the debate - "Marxism says in the final analysis the superstructure is determined by the economic base" - that sort of thing. The crude mis-

reading led to ideological back flips - an idealistic view of society where consciousness determines being. The notion of an integrated class struggle, of fighting on all fronts - the economic, political and ideological - could have been an antidote to both the "economic determinist" view and the idealistic view, but that modal of class struggle was simply not available from the socialist movement. Sometimes there was a demand to put a socialist feminist stamp on everything: anti fascism, health, Ireland, trade unions. Everything had to be intricately scrutinised, "added-in", deliberately, audited for content. There was a overwhelming self-consciousness to our feminism in those days. In the end some feminists, tired of trying to integrate class and sex chose to make it separate - equal but different, as the old male chauvinist expression goes. The writings of Heidi Hartman et al exemplified this political choice: society was made up of two systems, one divided by patriarchy the other by class. The ideas of socialist feminism are still relevant. We desperately need political signposts to guide us through the contradictory nature of the changes which have occurred in the relationships between the sexes. By the end of the century as many women as men will be in waged work. This women's work has a critical role in the restructuring of capitalism. The left has scarcely begun to analyse these changes. Should we turn once again to Marx's Capital? Re-reading his [copious] notes about work for nimble fingers, in areas of the economy where unions scarcely existed and where low wages were so low they were used to drive down the wages of the whole working class, it seems things have hardly changed! The central focus of all the socialist feminist debates was the family - they had an alternative vision of a society where social chaos could be replaced by rational, humane and equal relationships, where there could be a myriad of "family" relationships, but freely chosen. In capitalist societies, where existing family relationships are visibly disintegrating, without social institutions of any kind to replace them, we need alternatives to the various moral panics from the right and the so-called liberal establishment. Everything changes, everything stays the same. We live in a world where abortion rights may be established but discussion of abortion is still taboo. Women may no longer be prepared to be wife slaves, serving their man's meal up on the dot of 6.30, but we are still slaves to our children, taking the lioness's share of responsibility for childcare.

In the end it is working class women who still have a world to win. "Juggling" with the nanny, the job and the taps to the gym are simply not the same as being exhausted by poverty wages, insecurity and the constant worry that your kids will face a future of unemployment, poverty and despair. The sexual confidence that young working class women have today has brought us closer to the original goal of the women's liberation movement. This progress has even affected women with religious backgrounds, albeit in a contradictory way - platform shoes peeking out from underneath purdah. Yet as long as capitalism makes women into commodities that look like stick insects we are still quite far away from getting our sexual freedom. Nothing has changed... only socialism in the end can liberate humanity, lay the basis for the liberation of women and guarantee every individual man or woman can be creative, whole and free.

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## Indonesia: "Reform" government's record opens door to the right

By Martin Thomas

Indonesia's right-wing is trying to make a comeback. Using charges of corruption against President Abdurrahman Wahid, an alliance of Golkar (the ruling party under the old dictatorship overthrown in 1998) and Islamicists has organised street demonstrations and pushed through a parliamentary censure. It is not clear that Golkar and its allies want to remove Wahid immediately. Constitutionally they need a special session of the parliament to do that, and cannot get it for some months. It may be that they just want to rally their forces, make doubly sure that Wahid does nothing that harms their interests, and prepare the way for replacing him at a later stage.

According to Max Lane, writing in the Australian Green Left Weekly, Golkar "has retained, reasonably intact, the social base of support that it developed during the 33 years of the dictator's rule". The army and police support Golkar; so do most big business firms, including those who own the media. Mass support remains for Golkar among the professional petit bourgeoisie, wealthier farmers, and "the army of hundreds of thousands of petty[government] bureaucrats". These are minorities: but they are well-placed minorities, organised together in a political machine which has tentacles all over Indonesia.

Wahid's National Awakening Party has a mass base among Islamic students in schools linked to it, but that is mostly in East Java. The other bourgeois parties originating in the opposition to the dictatorship also lack solid organisation across Indonesia. Wahid's regime is weak also because of its record. It has failed to keep its promises on democratic reforms: to repeal the law banning advocacy of "Marxism-Leninism"; to end the army's reserved seats in parliament; to hold a referendum in Aceh on the future status of that area, where pressure for independence has grown; and to release from jail leaders of the West Papua struggle for independence.

On the economic front, Wahid never promised to do anything other than follow IMF policies, and he has done that. Prices of electricity, trains, ferries and fertiliser, and student fees, have been increased sharply. State-owned enterprises are being sold off, with job cuts. Some 137 million people in Indonesia are now estimated to be living below a poverty line of US \$2 a day. Indonesia's largest left-wing party, the PRD, has responded by proposing "a general campaign of all democratic forces" against Golkar and its allies, and specifically calling on the Nahdatul Ulama, the religious organisation tied to Wahid's party, to combine with the PRD on a common four-point political platform and a campaign of public meetings, seminars, and so on. Some PRD activists have opposed this view and, while agreeing that socialists should fight for democratic rights, argue that they should also focus on organising workers and striving to create and assert working class political force as independent from Wahid as it is from Golkar. On 14 November they quit the PRD and formed a new group, the Democratic Socialist Association. For the future of Indonesia and its working class, much depends on the ability of the Democratic Socialist Association to consolidate its organisation and develop its politics.

## The hard choices facing the campaign to save General Motors Vauxhall jobs in Britain

As lay-offs begin and the Luton workforce starts to be broken up, the campaign to save Vauxhall jobs is at a crucial stage. It is certainly not too late - but now is undoubtedly crunch-time. The way forward needs some serious thought. A campaign of limited strikes and lobbying the Government will not win: time is too short. But the campaign so far has included the means to win. The fantastic - and unprecedented - show of solidarity across GM Europe on 25 January shows the way forward. An amazing 40,000 - very nearly half - of GM's European workforce struck or protested, in the first ever action of this type, in Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal. Strike action across Europe can force GM to back down. An urgent meeting between Luton stewards and similar bodies in Europe is needed to work out can be done.

But, ultimately, European GM workers will need a concrete focus for any solidarity action. As big a step as it would obviously be, occupying at least part of the plant has to now be seriously considered. GM cannot run down, reorganise and ultimately dismantle a factory they are not in physical control of. Occupations have worked in the UK in recent history: in 1996, workers at the Glacier RPB engineering plant in Glasgow were sacked when they objected to the introduction of unsafe working practices and changes in their contracts, which included a reduction in their wages. They occupied and it was a hard fight - but they won their jobs back. Conversely, recent campaigns to save jobs that have shied away from this tactic have nearly all failed. The campaign at Luton should take on the spirit that saw Reilly's office occupied. Luton's jobs can be saved. A strategic occupation can paralyse the plant and keep the campaign to save jobs together - and be the spark to a fight across GM Europe.

### European Metalworkers' Federation statement, issued on 25.1.2001:

'The Action Day in support of GM's [General Motors - ed.] European locations is virtually the first event of this kind in the history of the European car industry. Over 40,000 employees in Europe stopped work to take part in the protest and demonstration. Some 16,000 workers in Germany (Rüsselsheim, Bochum, Kaiserlautern and Eisenach), 7,000 in Belgium (Antwerp), 11,000 in the UK (Luton and Ellesmere Port), 1,000 in Portugal and 5,000 in Spain all took part in this European Action Day.

"This striking example of European solidarity cannot fail to impress GM management" declared the EMF's General Secretary, Reinhard Kuhlmann, addressing the 7,000 workers assembled at the Opel AG plant in Rüsselsheim (FRG).

The protests of the GM employees at European level demonstrate their refusal to allow themselves to be played off one against the other. The Europe-wide protests will give added weight to the European Works Council negotiating team in its talks with GM management in Zurich. Protest action will continue in various forms in the event of GM not being willing to negotiate. The aim is to conclude a framework agreement that will result in suspension of the plant closures and mass redundancies and support for an innovative offensive for GM products in Europe.'

Visit the [www.savevauxhalljobs.org.uk](http://www.savevauxhalljobs.org.uk) website.

## Reviews

# Romance and Stalinism.

*Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary, by Carole Ferrier, Melbourne University Press.*

Reviewed by Janet Burstall.

Jean Devanny was a writer about romance and desire, as well as her other passion — class struggle and communist politics — the romance of hope for the future. Her best-known book, "Sugar Heaven", is a novel based on the epic North Queensland sugar cane cutters' strike of 1935. "The upheaval of 1908-13... was decisive in the making of New Zealand's working class" (p.19) and in Jean's early political education. She migrated to Australia in 1929, and joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1930. Jean became furiously active in front groups such as Militant Women's Movement, Workers International Relief (WIR) and the Writers' Association, a hugely successful paper seller and a charismatic public speaker.

In the 1930s the CPA leadership went underground. In 1940, while the USSR had a peace pact with Hitler, the CPA's publications were made illegal. The sexual puritanism which had obstructed the publication of Jean's books in the '20s and '30s, was compounded by the anti-Communist climate in the '40s and '50s. Even publishers with Party connections or left sympathies were unhelpful in the '50s.

Jean's relationships with the men who led the Party were ambivalent. She was for many years the lover of the main party leader, J.B. Miles, yet during part of that time she was expelled from the CP. Despite her ability and contributions, she was considered unreliable and was never considered for a leadership position. She argued her point of view, regardless of the line of the time, over the role of writers, and the needs of women, especially in terms of sexual relationships, birth control and abortion.

During the 1930s, Devanny made the first of many visits to North Queensland. There the most shocking episode of the book occurred, in 1941. Coming into conflict with a group of CP men about how they treated their wives, and with some of their wives for being unconventional, Jean was pack-raped. Mateship proved thicker than comradeship or a

sense of justice. The men made allegations of 'depravity' against Jean to Party leaders, and she was expelled without being allowed to defend herself, let alone seek action against her attackers. She was not readmitted to the Party until 1945.

Ferrier provides material to explore many questions. One of these is the relationship between the personal and political in Jean's life, especially the double-standard applied to Jean's sexual behaviour as compared to Party men. The men's sexual privacy was respected because standards allowed men to follow their desires. Jean, who did not accept the different standards imposed on women, and who advocated women's needs for birth control to support their sexual freedom, suffered scrutiny, disparagement and rape.

Another big question. How did Devanny, sharp and energetic, standing up to Party leaders on issues nearest to her heart, weave her way through the '30s and '40s with no apparent need to challenge the ill-explained twists and turns of the Moscow line? How, from the claim that social-democrats were 'social fascists', to the popular front with anyone anti-fascist; from supporting the Stalin-Hitler pact, to opposing strikes which might undermine the Allied War effort? Since Ferrier's politics are anti-Stalinist, she has probably included everything she could find on this topic. Which means that there is almost nothing. Devanny's access to other analyses was limited. "Discussion was free and democratic except for one point. No one was allowed to say, Trotsky is Right! Berating Trotsky was a must" (p.110). Devanny stuck with the CPA, leaving in 1950 but rejoining in 1957. In 1961, Devanny, sick with leukaemia, learnt about some men shot trying to escape from East Berlin along the Berlin Wall. When a friend "remarked 'Fancy trying to escape from Heaven!' [Jean] burst out Laughing" (p.310). Devanny had heroically held onto her romantic hope for the future, unlike thousands who had given up. But the political basis for that hope had deteriorated to tragicomedy.

## Lively discussion at public meeting on the Israel/Palestine crisis

By Lynn Smith

Twenty five people attended a Workers' Liberty public meeting held in the University of Sydney by Common Room on Orientation Day, February 21. The meeting was addressed by Vivienne Porzsolt, a Jewish peace activist; Sari Kassis of the Free Palestine Committee; and Martin Thomas, a British Marxist from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Vivienne introduced the audience to a wide variety of left-wing Israeli groups and prominent individuals in Israel who supported a just and negotiated peace with the Palestinian people. She also said that, although it is not yet widespread, there have been a number of cases of Israeli conscripts refusing to fight Palestinians and being jailed for it. A member of the audience with contacts in the Israeli army added that tens of thousands of Israeli reservists (who have completed their military service and are expected to re-enlist in times of crisis) were not showing up at Israeli army centres for service.

Sari spoke about the need for Israelis to acknowledge the past and accept that the Palestinian people were driven from their lands by force and were now living in what he described as "apartheid conditions". He said that Israelis must guarantee basic human rights to Palestinians before they (the Israelis) can expect the intifada to stop their activities e.g. granting the right to move freely from one place to another in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without being harassed by the military, the right to equal trade union representation (Palestinians working in Israel pay union dues but only receive 50-60 percent of the wages of an Israeli worker doing the same job) etc. Sari also spoke of attempts by right-wing Israelis to paint all Palestinian activists as Muslim fundamentalists and the intifada as a "jihad" or holy war. He indicated that he is a secular Palestinian (as are

many in the resistance movement) and that the struggle is *not* a religious war between Muslims and Jews, but between the Palestinian people who have not yet won their basic rights and right-wing Israelis who don't give a damn.

Martin said that whilst the struggle has a clear class content, because of the colonialism of the past 50 years it was not immediately possible at this time for Jewish and Palestinian workers to stand together against their common enemies: the Palestinian and Israeli capitalists. Socialists recognised the rights of oppressed nations to self-determination. It is the responsibility of class-conscious workers in Israel, Australia and elsewhere, he said, to win support in their unions for the struggle of the Palestinian people to put an end to new Jewish settlements, for the return of all lands captured during the 1967 war, and the setting up of an independent, fully-functioning Palestinian administration free of the Israeli army, Israeli check points and Israeli harassment.

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## **Sharon victory – what next?**

*(Continued from page 20)*

The war with the Palestinians, a war of Barak's own making, is taking place right here and now. The debate over these elections, which absorbed peace activists in an often acrimonious debate, has now become moot. After these results, the Israeli peace movement must rebuild its inner coherence to confront the bleak new reality. In fact, opposition to the new regime started a few days before the elections, when the polls already left little doubt about the results. Last Saturday, thousands marched across Jerusalem, under driving rain, to commemorate the 18th anniversary of the murder of Emil Grunzweig — the peace activist killed by a Sharon follower during a 1983 demonstration demanding Sharon's resignation from the Defence Ministry. A day later, 17 among hundreds of protesting activists were arrested while blocking the road in front of the Defence Ministry to protest the cruel siege of the Palestinian population. And the Yesh Gvul movement reports a great increase in the number of soldiers refusing service in the occupied territories ever since Sharon started to show a lead in the polls.

One more thing: this new Prime Minister will soon struggle with the impossibility in this polarised country of creating a stable government. There is an inevitable contradiction between the interests of the ultra-orthodox and the Russian immigrants who are adamant against religious coercion — and Sharon will need them both. More important, Sharon will need to face the insurgent Palestinians and unveil the practical solutions which he has to offer — something he carefully avoided doing during the election campaign. Sharon's career over the past four decades leaves little doubt about what his natural tendency would lead him to do: increase the brutal oppression of the Palestinians even beyond the levels to which Barak resorted. That is certainly what the settlers and other Sharon allies on the extreme right expect of him — but that road could lead to an all-out regional war, to Israel's international isolation and a deep rift in Israeli society. Avigdor Lieberman of the quasi-fascist "National Unity Party", who may get a senior portfolio in the Sharon cabinet, has already set it out in vivid colours, in a newspaper interview which was highly embarrassing to the Sharon campaign: reconquest of the Palestinian

enclaves, all-out regional war, Israeli planes bombing from Cairo to Teheran...

Alternatively, Sharon may strive to create a moderate image, and make some superficial conciliatory gestures at the outset of his term; but there is no way he can reopen serious negotiations with the Palestinians — even were he so inclined — without unravelling his own constituency. A Sharon cabinet will be weak and unsteady, torn by internal contradictions and commanding only a slender parliamentary majority. His rival, former PM Binyamin Netanyahu, will be constantly breathing down Sharon's neck. Should the Labour Party succeed in replacing Barak by a leader not tainted with colossal failure, it stands a good chance of recovering from the fiasco and contesting a new set of elections in the not-too-distant future. After all, the same opinion polls which predicted today's results also clearly indicated that repudiation of Barak does not necessarily imply rejection of the peace process. On the contrary: even while Sharon was climbing higher and higher in the polls, a steady 65% to 70% majority in the same polls expressed themselves in favour of continuing the peace process.

And Shimon Peres, a Labourite with a much more dovish image than Barak, had done much better than him in the polls and could have faced Sharon on much more equal terms — though Barak obstinately rejected all pleas and entreaties to let this possibility be put to the electoral test. The election results — while a grave set-back which could cost the lives of many — do not alter the basic ingredients of the situation: neither the Palestinians' determination to obtain sovereign statehood on their own soil, nor the disinclination of most Israelis to sacrifice their soldier sons in the cause of denying the Palestinians that statehood. And that disinclination certainly extends to many of those who voted for Sharon.

Tel Aviv, 6 February 2001

*The authors contribute to "The Other Israel", the newsletter of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace [http://other\\_israel.tripod.com/](http://other_israel.tripod.com/) Subscription requests to: [otherisr@actcom.co.il](mailto:otherisr@actcom.co.il)*

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# Workers' Liberty

Israel /Palestine conflict:

## Sharon victory - what next?

By Adam Keller and Beate Zilversmidt

So, these most miserable elections ended as expected - Ariel Sharon's victory with 62.5% of the vote.. What would have seemed an implausible nightmare but a few months ago is now sober reality. Still, the result is not so much the victory of a notorious hard-liner as it is the defeat of the failing incumbent. Ehud Barak, the man who spoke peace but went to war, was not so much defeated by the opposition as by himself. As no leader of the right could possibly have done, it was Barak who fatally broke up and demoralised the peace constituency, driving a large number of his former voters into boycotting the elections or casting blank ballots. The Arab citizens of Israel — a community which gave Barak 95% of its vote in 1999, more than any other segment of Israeli society — already hurt by Barak's patronising attitude and his pointed refusal to include them in his cabinet, were traumatised by his police shooting down 13 demonstrators in the Arab villages and towns of northern Israel. And also among Jewish voters of the peace camp, the Blank Ballot option — a deliberate campaign to cast a no vote, hitherto promoted only by marginal groups — became widely attractive.

Barak's camp was a depressed, a split camp — with the "in spite of everything" voters and the ones who decided to boycott an election where the choice was between bad and worse. For Sharon to have such a smashing victory over Barak it was enough to have his own constituency turn up. He could count on his own party as well as on the ultra-right and the religious. Where most election campaigns are directed towards the "middle of the road" Ariel Sharon this time didn't have to make much of an effort to convince this sector. In the one and a half years of his term, Barak did raise some positive ideas, some of them actually taboo-breaking — but until his last day in office his seriousness about actually carrying them out remained uncertain. He failed to build trust with the Palestinians (or for that matter, with many sections of the Israeli society), nor did he implement a single one of the many far-reaching concessions which he verbally espoused.

Meanwhile, he did continue with the policy of settlement extension and confiscation of Palestinian lands, destruction of Palestinian houses. And when, after the September provocation, Palestinians on Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif burst out in anger, Barak reacted with what the UN Security Council rightfully condemned as an excessive use of force, though Barak himself termed it "a policy of restraint." A restraint which led to seven deaths on the very first day, reaching a total of nearly 400 in the following months, many of them children — not to mention thousands of wounded, many of them crippled for life; hundreds of destroyed houses; tens of thousands of felled trees; closure, siege and curfew reducing millions to poverty and hardship... Barak's conduct — making concessions, but just too few to get an agreement, and then accusing his Arab interlocutors of intransigence — has discredited peace among the Israeli population, thereby paving the way for Sharon. The peace movement was simply too divided. Many of his most enthusiastic supporters in 1999 felt unable to vote back into office a prime minister who launched the worst wave of repression since Israel occupied these territories in 1967. And the others weren't really enthusiastic, even if they did vote for "the lesser evil." Indeed, Ariel Sharon's CV stretches from the massacre of Palestinian civilians at Quibya in 1953 to the massacre of Palestinian civilians at Sabra and Shatila in 1982. Once the Kahan Commission of Inquiry excluded him from involvement in military matters he found other ways to deserve the nickname "the bulldozer." It should have been easy enough to frighten the Israeli electorate by no more than factually recounting Sharon's career. In fact, the considerable efforts made in this direction by Barak's best propagandists failed against one simple consideration: Sharon's war had taken place nearly 20 years ago, and much of the electorate is too young to remember or have lived in Russia at the time. (Continued on page 19)

