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



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Secrets and lies Howard exposed It's time for a union offensive

Inside:

Secrets, lies and blocking supply

Refugee rights – we need a united campaign

Rethinking the political front: open letter

Socialist Alliance, the ALP and independent working class politics

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir

Indonesia: Dita Sari speaks with Workers' Liberty

Socialists organise against oppression in Zimbabwe

South Africa: an alternative is within reach

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

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Secrets, lies and getting rid of Howard

There have been some calls for the Senate, particularly Labor, to block supply in response to the irrefutable revelation by Defence Force leaders that the "children overboard" stories were a fabrication.

The moral legitimacy of Howard's election victory has been questioned since, it is claimed, he won on the basis of a lie. Further pressure has been both added to Howard and deflected by the revelations of Howard's Archbishop G-G having covered up for institutionalised child abuse in the Queensland Anglican Church. Both scandals involve mistreatment of children, which touches off anger at injustice.

Socialists haven't lost confidence in the Government, because we never had confidence to lose. "We know Howard and his Ministers have lied about the GST, the MUA, and many other issues.

If we had a socialist Senator, he or she would generally vote against supply, crisis or no crisis, as a gesture of hostility to the government.

But a Labor vote against supply, if it happens at all, will be nothing more than a token. By itself it would be a controversial reminder of Fraser blocking supply to the Whitlam Government. We must look for more effective action elsewhere. A vote against supply would be more only in conditions of great mass agitation against the Howard government, union defiance, huge street demonstrations demanding Howard resign and so on.

This is what forced 4 presidents out of office in Argentina. The working class - with some help from the middle class, to be sure - has just got rid of four presidents, and is giving the fifth a very hard time. It has done it by repeated mass demonstrations, mass neighbourhood assemblies, etc.

If there were a movement on the streets against Howard, then we would call on Labor to obstruct the government in parliament, both the Senate and the House of Representatives as well as to come out boldly against the government on refugee rights.

At the moment there is not such a movement. But the widespread questioning of the legitimacy of the Government is an opening for effective working class opposition to the Government. If the ACTU were serious about demands such as repeal of the Workplace Relations Act, abolition of the GST, for a living wage, protection of worker entitlements (especially since the final collapse of Ansett) then now is a better time than ever to take them up. It's also a chance to oppose government plans to extend ASIO powers.

It is an opening for socialists and union militants to challenge the reluctance of union leaders to tackle the government, and to propose our own answers. The only answers that unions and Labor are giving Ansett workers is that they may not have to wait more than a year to receive most of their entitlements, and they can retrain for non-existent jobs. There are no answers on regional air services or keeping fares down, let alone reducing the environmental impact of aviation. The most workable solution that can provide aviation services and job security with decent conditions is for the whole industry to be expropriated and taken into public ownership under workers' and community control. The Ansett collapse is not the end of the squeeze on aviation services and workers - the Qantas maintenance workers are campaigning against a wage freeze, and the privatisation of Sydney Airport is planned for later in 2002. The Howard government is weak and the unions should be escalating and broadening a campaign.

What has brought the Government to this state of disarray? It is the exposure of secrets and lies of the Government, the military and the church. This exposure is the work of the media, anti-child abuse campaigners, questioning by the ALP in the Senate and honesty on the part of a few military top brass. But above all the sense of crisis is created by the coverage the media has given both stories - the children overboard lies, and the child abuse cover up by the church. These lies and secrets were not exposed via the democratic efforts of members of the House of Representatives, which is meant to be the "people's house", where political accountability is supposed to reside.

The legitimacy of the Howard Government is not the only legitimacy that is in doubt. Two million adults in the last election voted either informally, not at all, or for a party other than the Coalition or Labor. There is cynicism about democracy, and thus political participation.

Democratic political representation must be based on the principle of accountability, not privilege. Parliament itself needs to be democratised. A single chamber parliament elected annually, with representatives receiving the average pay of workers would remove the career opportunity and privileges that parliamentary position carries. Gone would be the motivation to spend millions of dollars on election campaigns. There should be neither governor-general nor president standing above parliament. And there should be no government secrets and privileged information.

If the Australian working class were roused to throw out Howard, then we could also campaign for such thorough going changes to the political system.

Refugee rights – We need a united campaign

Riki Lane, SA National Convenor writing in a personal capacity

Socialist Alliance (SA) has been a great step forward for the Australian left. Socialists from different traditions have worked together to mount election campaigns that have had some grip on the issues facing working people. We have started to establish branches with real roots in working class communities.

Now we have to take the next step – to establish ways for the affiliated groups and unaffiliated members to thrash out common approaches to campaigns, or at least to understand and make a serious effort to resolve the differences.

Refugee rights is a vital issue in politics today. Howard won the last election on the basis of xenophobia and racism toward asylum seekers. Unions are starting to seriously take up the issue, which necessarily involves taking on prejudices amongst their members. The ALP is in ferment as the Labor4Refugees network mounts a serious challenge to their leaders' cowardice.

SA can be proud that its members have been prominent in the campaigns. But there have been a number of disputes, not mainly over political issues, but more about organisational and "turf" ones. In Sydney, we have two campaigns, Free the Refugees (FRC) and Refugee Action Coalition (RAC). The FRC appears to be closely aligned to the DSP, while RAC is broader and has ISO members in leading positions. There have been coordination difficulties, with demonstrations being called within days of each other

In Melbourne, there is a well attended central RAC and a number of local groups. One of these, RAC West, is seen as dominated by the DSP and has been taking initiatives independently of the central group. DSP members have attacked the role of ISOer Judy McVey in representing RAC.

"Turf battles" between the ISO and the DSP (and other socialist groups) have been a feature of the political landscape for years. They often have a very destructive impact, with other activists being frustrated and demoralised. People often think that socialist groups are much more interested in building themselves than the movement.

The framework of SA offers the chance to overcome this problem. If we are to thrive, we need to develop ways for affiliates and other members to discuss tactical differences without engaging in destructive disputes in campaigns. We need open and honest discussion of political differences, not manoeuvring for organisational advantage.

It seems obvious that we need a united national refugee campaign, composed of open activist committees. In large cities like Melbourne and Sydney, central groups should be making decisions

about city wide actions, while local groups organise locally.

An important question this opens up is "front groups". Many socialist groups have had the practice of setting up campaigns that are closely linked to themselves. While other activists can join, the political leadership is clear. Sometimes this may be justified, where there are significant political differences with united campaigns, or where a group has been excluded. (WL of course opposes the exclusion of socialist, or other, groups from campaigns.)

Mostly, however, the "front" groups are seen as transmission belts into the particular socialist group. Their actions and policies are based on what will give advantage to the group without appearing to consider what actions and policies will advance working class consciousness and organisation. Hence the accusation arises of putting the needs of the group against that of the working class (Marx's definition of sectarian).

There was no reason to think that simply forming SA would cause its component groups to change their long established ways of acting in the labour and solidarity movements. But we have been cooperating well, which opens up the chance to discuss these issues in a serious and comradely manner, rather than in slanging matches.

For our part, Workers' Liberty thinks that you cannot separate out "building the revolutionary party" from building the class struggle. Seeing the preservation and extension of a group's apparatus as the group's primary goal is a recipe for sectarianism. The establishment of SA is an indication that we can all break from that method.

Recent developments show that there are grounds for optimism of an outbreak of political maturity. The SA convenors have opened a discussion about how best to build the refugee campaign and how to deal with differences in SA. Honest, open dialogue can undermine hostility and suspicion.

We need to think about how the refugee solidarity campaigns can make links with workers. There is an issue of political substance underlying the skirmishing and that is Labor4refugees, and the indication that it gives that the ALP is not totally moribund as a part of the working class movement, something which the DSP rejects, and the ISO and WL do not.

Other issues in terms of trying to relate to workers are:

- investigating how different groups of workers come into contact with asylum seekers and Temporary Protection Visa holders, and seeking to educate our fellow workers in workplaces about the issues;

- encouraging further exposure of secrets and scandals about the treatment of refugees;

- making sure that we in the SA give a HIGH priority to visibly responding to issues affecting Australian workers directly, e.g. Ansett collapse, to bridge the gap between refugee supporters and the broader working class, the gap that Howard exploits with his fear and scare campaigns.

Rethinking the "political front"

Open letter from Workers' Liberty to the International Socialist Organisation. 4 February 2001 (edited from a leaflet distributed at the ISO Conference on 2 February)

The Socialist Alliance election result was a disappointment when measured against the claims made by many ISO members _ that there were thousands and thousands of angry Labor voters out there, just looking for something like the SA to give votes to.

Angry Labor voters there were - but the left-wing protest votes went to the Greens. And, sadly, it was predictable. The SA stuck to a minimal platform of current demands, devoid of any explanation of class struggle, public ownership under worker-community control, and socialism. We didn't say a lot more than the Greens - and the Greens had the established profile.

Workers' Liberty proposed a more explicitly socialist platform, for the Socialist Alliance - not rah-rah-revolutionary, not so high-pitched as to be beyond the range of the average human ear, but plainly staking out an independent working-class stance, plainly advocating a workers' government. Can we guarantee that would have reaped more votes? No. We can guarantee it would make the SA election campaign immeasurably more effective at educating and galvanising support for real socialism. To end up offering a less pragmatic version of the Greens platform, without any of the Greens' established ability to attract votes, is to lose out both coming and going.

A largely negative election platform - expressing anger at Labor's betrayals without a spelled-out alternative - and an election campaign mostly limited to very general advocacy (for example, and mainly, against the Afghanistan war), without an effort to dig roots and establish real dialogue in working-class communities, cannot bring very good results from electoral work. But there are other ways to contest elections!

The "united front"

We don't accept that the SA election result, and the difficulties that the ISO is experiencing in recruiting are in any way the result of participating in an electoral project as such. We think they are the result of a deeper problem with the politics of the ISO. The SWP in Britain, or the DSP in Australia, have the "first-comer" advantage of having the biggest political machines on the activist left in their countries. That gives them momentum as against the others, at least for a while and in normal circumstances, regardless of politics. If you are smaller, then you only gain members if you can persuade them of your political ideas. But the ISO has avoided any attempt to persuade the rest of the members of the Socialist Alliance of any political positions - other than the need to be more reformist to fit the perceived "mood". No wonder the ISO has no great gains to show for it!

We would have liked to ally with the ISO in some debates in the Socialist Alliance - on an insistence that socialism comes from below; that socialism can only be made by the organised workers; that Stalinism, even in its Cuban variant, represented no kind of socialism; that we must orient patiently towards the mass labour movement, not thinking we can bypass it by means of this or that radical current on the streets. No such luck.

The ISO used to think that elections were a waste of time because anyone getting involved in electoral politics would have to turn reformist to catch votes. Now it has been convinced that elections may be an important political opportunity - but it is still caught in the same conception of what they involve. We think that the Bolshevik tradition shows that it is possible to use the forums of bourgeois society to express a clearly anti-bourgeois, working-class politics.

We are quite flabbergasted by the ISO's using the phrases "action platform" or "electoral united front" to justify this reformist approach to the election. "United front", in the Marxist sense, means joint working-class action on limited issues within which the Marxists, basing themselves on the experience of the action, press for debate and discussion to convince their allies of our revolutionary answers. An "electoral united front" where the action is largely confined to leafleting and holding propaganda meetings, and the effort of the Marxists of the ISO is to convince their allies about why they should be more... reformist - that is the Marxist conception turned upside down!

Marxism and "the mood"

The argument of the ISO seems to be that the mass mood had been perceived to be anger with the Liberals and a yearning for a true, traditional Labor government, even if such a thing were a sentimental figment of the imagination. This mood, which represented a lift from previous demoralisation meant not that the time was right to present some socialist explanation of an alternative to Labor, but to try to catch the mood as it was, at its perceived current level of consciousness, as if to intersect with it, be allowed onto it, and then, what? Once snug and safe on the wave of the mood, to then seek to take it more daring and revolutionary places?

So when the workers are beginning to get on the move, socialists should get more reformist. Sharp Marxist explanations, bold demands, advanced ideas - those are for when the working class is more inert, and the revolutionaries supposedly need the bold slogans to "insulate" them from their not-so-revolutionary environment. Upside-down again!

It's as if the ISO doesn't really believe that Marxist ideas can be applied in practice, and make sense to workers - they're only for when workers are not listening! The ISO seems to base its politics on guessing what will "fit the mood". (Thus, the splits with Socialist Action and Socialist Alternative seemed not to be based on political differences, but on the assessment of "the mood" _and thus the right tactic for the time).

There's at least one problem about this approach. When there is more than one "mood" at a time - and

there often is - it is so easy to get confused. Some of you want to orient to the "anti-Liberal" mood, while others want to relate to the "anti-capitalist" mood. You end up in conflict with one another because you do not have an integrated political approach to the working class.

Ideas do matter. Politics is more than guessing "the mood". You know this. You wouldn't be having genuine discussion at your conference if it you didn't. But we urge you to draw the conclusions. Stop treating the rest of us (both the socialist left, and the labour movement left) as if all that matters is being more militant, and we shouldn't discuss ideas. Stop inoculating your activists against seeking to clarify demands or ideas, with derogatory expressions such as "demand-mongering". Rethink "sectarianism". Properly, it means allowing private, small-group considerations to override our responsibilities to the broader class struggle. All too often you have used it to mean the opposite: letting programmatic politics (based on responsibility to the broad, long-term class struggle) impede or hinder what seems to be smart tactics for a small socialist group.

Unity and debate

We need a much larger class struggle left wing, unity of the socialists, a coherent, capable and credible socialist force. The whole working class movement needs those things. Socialism is discredited today, and our own divisions over apparently obscure issues adds to our lack of credibility. It is our duty to work for unity, not just basic organisational unity, but for real political unity around a program of class struggle for

workers power. This can't be achieved all at once, but the formation of the Socialist Alliance is a step towards this. Workers' Liberty places a high value on the start the SA has made in creating an environment in which we have had far more dialogue and honest discussion in one year than in the previous decades. We appeal to the ISO to stay in the SA and grapple with the political problems, not to base your decisions primarily on trying to guess the mood and the tactic to match.

We appeal to the ISO to open up to broader discussion of socialist politics. Specifically we urge you to reconsider your opposition to trying to generate public debate about contentious issues in a Socialist Alliance publication. The challenge of retaining a basis for unity of the Alliance in fuller consciousness of our disagreements will enable us to engage wider layers of class conscious workers in discussion with us, demonstrate the democratic principles which we advocate in the labour movement as a whole, and prepare us all to be better at applying our principles to mass work in the labour movement.

Last year at Marxism 2001, David Glanz recalled Engels' definition of the three fronts of the class struggle, economic, political and ideological. The ISO was familiar with the economic and ideological fronts, he said; but it was moving into systematic action on the political front for the first time. The first campaign on that front has been no great success - but the answer is not, and cannot be, to retreat in disorder, leaving that front as a free run for the enemies of socialism. The answer is to learn to fight better.

**The next general meeting of Labor for Refugees, NSW,
will be on March 13 at 6pm LHMU Auditorium 187 Thomas St
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**For further information, contact Amanda Tattersall on 0408
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<http://www.labor4refugees.org/>

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 3. An end to Temporary Protection Visas and the granting of permanent residency to asylum seekers awarded refugee status
 4. An end to the privatisation of detention centres
 5. The immediate removal of children and their guardians from detention centres
 6. An end to the "pacific solution"
 7. An end to the linking of the on shore and off shore refugee quota
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-

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The Socialist Alliance, the ALP and independent working class politics

Leon Parissi

Is the tactic of creating a leftwing electoral grouping such as the Socialist Alliance correct when the ALP continues to hold sway with the vast majority of working people. Or can socialists orient to both in a principled way? Should regroupment of the left take another form? These and other questions are discussed below.

Bob Gould, a Sydney left wing bookseller, regularly publishes polemical articles. One recent article deals with the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the Socialist Alliance (SA). Another is aimed at the Labor Party's enquiry into the results of the last Federal election.

One of Gould's usual targets is the largest leftwing group in Australia, DSP which he more or less correctly targets for its single minded and sectarian "expose Laborism and all its works at all costs" attitude to the labour movement. He is critical of the DSP's rigid internal regime and aims that same criticism at the ISO.

He is also critical of the Socialist Alliance (SA) as an electoral grouping on the basis that it is highly unlikely to successfully challenge the superior electoral machinery of the ALP or is likely to take over the space the Greens have established to the left of Labor. He would prefer leftwing regroupment along the following tack:

1. That the Socialist Alliance stop its electoral activity and engage instead in open polemical discourse between the constituent members of the SA, ALP lefts and other socialist groups not in the SA.
2. To orient to the related political battles in the ALP and the trade union movement on the "60/40" and "Labor for Refugees" issues.

Socialists and the labour movement

For the DSP it is all too easy to counter that Gould is merely proposing that socialists lose themselves in the mire of the ALP. Many a one time Marxist has succumbed to the pressures of trying to challenge for a leadership position in the working class and ended up in the arms of social democracy. The risk certainly exists. The DSP responds traditionally by placing the interests of their organization before the needs of the actual struggle. The ISO traditionally responded to this risk with a certain abstentionist attitude to work in the labour movement for fear of being sucked into the orbit of the bureaucracy.

The DSP one-sidedly sees union leaderships as 'controlled by the ALP'. But in reality the social democratic policy of co-operating with the rule of Capital is just as strong in union leaderships as it is in the ALP. They are two sides of the same coin. Labor Party factions are mostly union based.

In its more reformist phases the ALP in government has delivered useful reforms. And the unions are the most effective defensive organisations working people have, as we saw in the struggle to defend the wharves in 1998. But both the ALP and unions are inadequate to the task of fully protecting and extending the interests of working people as neither will challenge the 'legitimacy' of private ownership. The ACTU had no real answer for Ansett workers except placing trust in their class enemies, Fox and Lew. Nationalisation under workers' control is the socialist answer to tragedies such as the Ansett collapse.

This situation does not make one side of the labour movement all bad (ALP) and the other side capable of salvation (unions). But this appears to be what the DSP thinks. Reality is more complicated. The solution to the problem of reformism is not just a matter of union leaderships 'letting go of the ALP'. These leaders have their own reformist agendas. What process is envisaged by the DSP to put unions on a socialist path if they ditch the ALP? Alison Dellit, in Green Left Weekly, suggests the unlikely scenario of unions affiliating to the Socialist Alliance. The DSP does not recognise that it would be a defeat of historic proportions if the 'capitalist agenda', as Bob Gould correctly puts it, of separating the union movement from the ALP is achieved.

Careerism versus ranks

These labor movement leaders see the main chance of improving their own lives coming from union careerism and if they are clever and careful maybe a sinecure in Parliament or some government appointment. The vast majority of working people accept this happening with a degree of cynicism and in the hope that the best chance of improving their lives comes from gradual reforms coming out of this process - and not from overturning capitalism. We may not like it but that's the way it is. We should not be daunted by this reality but as Marxists this must be part of our starting point. Our opportunity partly lies in taking advantage of the tension between the labor bureaucrats and the aspirations of the ranks below.

In "Observations..." we find a set of perspectives which Bob Gould says should be the focus of political activity in the 21st Century. Some of the perspectives are so unlikely to be carried out that one wonders why they were included. For example, admirable though the idea may be, how likely is it that the Australian left could agree to:

"commence a serious programme of educational work, common to all the groups, directed at their members and supporters, with a serious combination of discussion and development of basic Marxism, with examination of current Australian reality, linked with a thorough, comprehensive and dialectical account of Australian labor history."

In the mid-1980s Bob Gould hosted a series of well attended inter-left discussions aimed at regroupment. One of the reasons that this initiative did not succeed was not just the inability of the groups and individuals to find sufficient common ground to continue theoretical discussions but also there was no perspective for testing out areas of agreement in practice. This time around, in the new century, Gould appears to have modified his regroupment scenario. But not by much.

Bob Gould's current perspectives conclude with a slogan often used by Workers' Liberty: "Build a class struggle left wing in the labor movement". From the Workers' Liberty point of view this should be the primary focus of political work. If this is done correctly and the times allow (a political or economic crisis erupts for instance) then it must have an impact on the ALP. What is missing from Bob Gould's analysis is some concrete method for implementing the slogan. The closest he comes to this is a call for the socialist groups to embark on "long term, patient and energetic rank and file organisation in trade unions and the working class." Workers' Liberty would agree with this perspective too. It is, once again, an orientation we have carried out in our union work for many years.

When we look at the Socialist Alliance membership however, we see little evidence of this perspective now and given the traditional attitude of the major players, the DSP and the ISO, it is not likely to be taken up. Both these organisations see union work, on the whole, with some encouraging exceptions, as arenas for propaganda and recruitment. For the DSP it is mainly for anti-ALP propaganda purposes or to raise support for various worthy causes (East Timor, refugees etc).

The ISO traditionally has a phobia about work in unions, apart from raising worthy issues, based on the notion that to run for office would be to risk contamination by the bureaucracy. For them the inoculation against this threat is abstentionism. Although, again, there may be some exceptions. The ISO also has traditionally a phobia with discussing ideology. It is often sufficient for them to use 'anti-imperialist militancy' as a replacement.

Bob Gould gets part of it right in that thrashing out these issues may help overcome wrongheaded ideas. But he has chosen to not join in the SA on the basis of preferring his ALP party ticket. The problem with Gould's proposals is that while he correctly identifies the problems that the DSP and the ISO must have in relating to any revival of rank and file mobilization within the labour movement, he develops no clear proposal for how his strategy is to be implemented. In "Observations." he writes:

"It is hopelessly right wing for some people who claim to be Marxists, not to throw their full energies into the coming battle against the push from the ruling class to drive the unions out of the ALP."

In the "Submission..." he supports a project aimed at "re-establishing the ALP as a serious party of reform in the interests of the working class and the useful section of the middle class"

He is presumably playing to those in the ALP who are putting up a fight against the anti-union "Blairisation" project of people like Mark Latham, Carmen Lawrence and Simon Crean. But the perspective he presents is clearly reformist. He presents no comprehensive socialist program. Rather we see two parallel lines of thought, the parliamentary face he gives to the Wran Enquiry and an undeveloped class struggle line. The two are expected to somehow merge and spill over into a movement for socialism.

Where the DSP tries to give us a false choice between either the Socialist Alliance or work in the labour movement Bob Gould tries to have his politics each way by putting his left face to the ISO and his reformist face to the ALP. If, as Marxists, we are to give working people reason to go beyond reformism we must be with them in struggle. The essential task of for socialists is encouraging the democratic self-organisation of the working class. The message of the Socialist Alliance should be a call for the creation of a workers' government.

Trotsky in the early 1930s argued that the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in Britain had made a mistake in splitting from the Labour Party. He urged British Trotskyists to get into the ILP and try to win over the activists there (which included an argument on the need for the ILP to reorient to Labour - though Trotsky was emphatically in favour of the ILP running its own election candidates in the meantime). Involvement of a group in the SA does not necessarily rule out involvement in the ALP, and that preferential voting gives us the opportunity to stand socialist candidates for first votes and transfer to ALP second preferences.

Bob Gould's articles referred to above are:

"Observations on the Discussion in the ISO and Issues raised for the Left", 1/2/02 and

"Submission to the ALP Committee of Enquiry, subsequent to the 2001 Federal Election", 17/2/02. They are available from him at 42 King Street Newtown, Sydney.

See also the recent exchange between Alison Dellit and this writer in the DSP's Green Left Weekly which is re-printed at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/workersliberty/>

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir:

Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan, visited London in January and spoke to Faz Velmi about the political situation in Pakistan after the Afghanistan war and the activity and views of the LPP.

Most of the fundamentalists in Pakistan are quite frustrated and bitter by the Taliban's defeat. They saw the Taliban leaders run away from Kabul and Kandahar, and leave the Pakistani and Libyan Taliban to be butchered. Some administrative measures against the fundamentalists have been taken by the Musharraf regime, but as long as the economic agenda of the IMF and the World Bank is going on, creating a lot of unemployment, more fundamentalism will be promoted. The root cause of fundamentalism is the social conditions in Pakistan. So the depressed feeling among the fundamentalists in Pakistan may be momentary.

Musharraf has banned two fundamentalist groups, and the LPP has supported banning. In Britain - I know the conditions are different, but the basic arguments seem similar - we have opposed calls for the government to ban fascist groups, because we don't want to strengthen the state.

It had been our demand in the past, to ban the terrorist groups promoting fundamentalism. At first Musharraf's measures gave us a relieved feeling, it was the first time in 25 years there had been some measures by the state against fundamentalism. Later we analysed the situation and came to the conclusion that administrative suppression was insufficient to end fundamentalism. We could not be in favour of Musharraf's measures.

We demand the repeal of the blasphemy laws, that make women half of men; the Islamic Ideological Council; and the parallel system of law, sharia, should be removed. The measures Musharraf has adopted, of suppression and banning, deal with only one little aspect of the whole problem.

Musharraf also praised the madrassas, the religious schools. There are 35,000 madrassas in Pakistan, with over a million students. They are a breeding ground for fundamentalism. There is less than 10% literacy in Pakistan. These madrassas are not making people literate. Religious education is not helping society to flourish economically, socially and politically. We demand all the madrassas should be taken over by the state and nationalised. The teachers should be given government jobs, a normal curriculum should be established.

What about the planned elections in October?

Around 400 seats have been declared, with more seats for women and more seats for national minorities. There is a joint electorate - which was our demand - rather than a separate electorate for non-Muslims. But we think the army intend to install a

puppet civil government to work under Musharraf. They have created a new party, the National Democratic Party; are promoting one wing of the Muslim League which has broken from Nawaz Sharif, the Awami National Party from the Frontier Province, and one section of the MQM. They plan to bring in their own people through this alliance. Last year they reformed the local government elections - making 33% of the seats for women, and so on. But we don't think these measures make Musharraf a progressive dictator. He is doing them to please the Western media. Under the cover of the political reforms, Musharraf is pushing his anti-worker economic agenda - the agenda of the IMF and the World Bank. He is promoting privatisation and downsizing; General Sales Tax has been imposed; the trade borders of Pakistan have been lowered, and the market opened to be looted by the international monopolies.

What does the LPP say about Kashmir and the threat of war between India and Pakistan?

A real danger of war is still there. By attacking Afghanistan, American imperialism has created a new argument - that whenever there is conflict it should be solved by military means. Vajpayee, the prime minister of India, uses the same language as Bush. Vajpayee party, the BJP, is Hindu chauvinist. The war has been a very good opportunity for him to use anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan demagoguery. Twice recently we have made fact-finding missions, along with journalists, to the Pakistan-India border, to areas around Lahore. We found most of the villagers and peasants there, contrary to the government account, do not want any war. In the cities, too, there is an overwhelming wish for peace. It is the first time that there has been an overwhelming majority in Pakistan against war. It was not the same in 1965 and 1971.

Some credit must go to the LPP policy of initiating a peace movement in Pakistan. We had a big demonstration on 31 December. We took 2,000 people to the border area. We were beaten up by police, but that demonstration had a massive effect in the 75 villages around the border.

The LPP is for an independent Kashmir - the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri masses, independent of Pakistan and India. We demand an immediate end to state brutality on both sides, and the withdrawal of both the Pakistani and the Indian armies. The Pakistani state has been using the fundamentalist jihad in Kashmir to make the Kashmiri national struggle a religious struggle. But it is not a religious struggle. Unfortunately the Indian left have not come out very clearly for an independent Kashmir. They want more autonomy for Kashmir within the limits of the Indian state. The Kashmiri masses have rejected this again and again, by not participating in elections and so on. We want a plebiscite, to be held under committees of the Kashmiri masses, not the UN. We have not been able to have face to face meetings with the Indian left. We have contact - by email - with the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist, who support autonomy and oppose Indian state terrorism and war between India and Pakistan. We invited the CPI ML leaders to our congress last year but they couldn't come. It is harder to go from Lahore to Delhi than to London. We are in contact with an Indian Trotskyist group associated with the

United Secretariat of the Fourth International, but they are far from the border areas and are not very big or influential. They are for an independent Kashmir.

The Afghan Workers' Solidarity Campaign?

This is the best initiative we have done recently, with comrades in the Scottish Socialist Party. So far we have produced three issues of a monthly paper in Pashtu, and sent a truckload of material worth half a million rupees from Lahore. Our solidarity is practical but also about ideological help. Seven radical left groups from Afghanistan met in Peshawar last month and agreed to form a committee. They are mostly ex-Maoist. The main group is the ex-Maoist Afghan Revolutionary Labour Organisation. They are closer to our politics now and have withdrawn their initial support for Zahir Shah [Afghan king]. The Afghan left groups are quite influential in the refugee camps in Pakistan. They have done heroic work. Many, many of their activists have been killed. One of their women comrades came to Lahore and spoke very bravely without purdah in a meeting of 200, mainly men.

The Afghan Workers' Solidarity Campaign can create some sort of basis for a new left in Afghanistan. The old Stalinist groups have been defeated and disillusioned. The new groups have been making visits to Afghanistan for a long time, but they are still based in Pakistan. There is a very big discussion among them about whether they should go back now the Northern Alliance is in power. The NA are fundamentalists as well and the comrades don't want to voluntarily hand themselves over to another fundamentalist group. When we launched the Labour Party of Pakistan in 1997, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) had three delegates to our congress. There are some political and ideological differences between us and them but in solidarity work we stand shoulder to shoulder. RAWA is mainly organised by ex-Maoists. Because of their ideology they see some progressive role for the bourgeoisie, and they support Zahir Shah. Their activity to defend women's rights in Afghanistan is very good.

Some people have criticised the LPP for being too tied up with NGOs. We take part in a Joint Action Committee for People's Rights, which includes 28 large NGOs in Lahore and three political parties, the LPP, the National Workers' Party, and the Christian National Party. There has been a division in the social movement in Pakistan on how much we should oppose fundamentalism and how much we should oppose American imperialism. In their hatred against fundamentalism - most of these NGOs have been attacked by fundamentalists, who have burned down their offices - some NGOs favoured a measured attack on Afghanistan by American imperialism. We totally opposed that and were able to create some sort of balance in the movement.

We attack fundamentalism, but we also oppose American aggression in Afghanistan. The USA is not the force that will stop fundamentalism. It has promoted it in the past, and is opposing it now only for the sake of revenge and its prestige.

Our aim is to intervene in the social movement and polarise it on class lines. We are a small party. If we had a mass party in Pakistan, then most of these

NGOs would have joined the Labour Party and campaigned through it. Because of the lack of an alternative mass left force, the NGOs have played a part. At least people in their outreach are not fanatics. They promote liberalism, that is basic democratic, human values.

Now the LPP can go much further. We have 70 elected councillors, and 2,600 members with maybe 500 activists. All around the country we have people coming into our offices daily to sign forms and join the LPP.

We want to form an electoral left alliance. We are talking to the National Workers' Party. We quit the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy. We demand: no privatisation; nationalise all the privatised industries and the large monopolies; no downsizing in the public sector - over 100,000 public employees' jobs have been lost in the last two years; a minimum wage of 7,000 rupees; a drastic cut in the defence budget; don't pay the foreign debt. There have been important peasant struggles recently. We are supporting peasants in a struggle over land with the army for 68,000 families 10,000 peasants. After the big rally, the army went on the offensive, killed people, burned down houses, and used axes to cut the legs of cows and buffaloes so as to drive the peasants off the land.

Afghanistan - Have Bush's bombs brought peace in the region?

Socialist Alliance sponsored Australian tour by Farooq Tariq

Hear Farooq Tariq, the general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP), talk about their struggles against the US war drive, the Islamic fundamentalists, the military dictatorship, and the bosses. The LPP has been the leading force in building a secular mass opposition movement to the war on Afghanistan. Farooq will be touring Australia for the Socialist Alliance in April 2002.

Farooq is an active journalist unionist, a member of the Joint Action Committee for the defence of journalists in Pakistan, publisher of *Mazdoor Jeddojuhd* (workers struggle) the only trade union weekly of Pakistan in print for the last 22 years.

Farooq commented after the fall of Kabul:

There could be a little so called liberal time in Afghanistan if a broad base government is established under the influence of US imperialism. But this government can be very short lived, as it will not be able to control the situation. A new phase of civil war can be seen. If a government in Afghanistan is established against the total wishes of Pakistani military regime, a war between Pakistan and Afghanistan can not be ruled out.

Labour Party Pakistan will help the tiny forces of the Left in Afghanistan. The *Weekly Mazdoor Jeddojuhd* is planning to print a monthly edition of the paper in Pushto with the close collaboration of Afghanistan Revolutionary Labour Organization.

Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign Appeal:

The Left internationally should carry on to oppose the strategy of US imperialism of war and bringing a new puppet regime in Afghanistan. The war has not ended. It has entered in a new phase. The anti globalization campaign linked to the peace movement must carry on. One fundamentalist group is gone, the other, with the help of US, has come to power. We have no choice but to oppose this new change in Kabul for a better democratic socialist change.

There has been a division in the social movement in Pakistan on how much we should oppose fundamentalism and how much we should oppose American imperialism - some NGOs favoured a measured attack on Afghanistan by American imperialism. We totally opposed that and were able to create some sort of balance in the movement. We attack fundamentalism, but we also oppose American aggression in Afghanistan. The USA is not the force that will stop fundamentalism.

So far we have produced three issues of a monthly paper in Pashtu, and sent a truckload of material worth half a million rupees from Lahore. Our solidarity is practical but also about ideological help.

Send cheques to and postal orders to 'Afgan Workers Solidarity Campaign' PO Box A2323 1235 Sydney South or deposit to Commonwealth Bank, Account Number 06201810120961.

Indonesia: Dita Sari speaks with Workers' Liberty

"Workers have seen by their own experience that Habibie, Wahid, and Megawati" - all the presidents since the fall of Indonesia's military dictatorship in May 1998 - "are the same. Nothing has changed in their economic situation", according to Dita Sari. The Indonesian socialist and trade union leader spoke to Paul Hampton and Martin Thomas in London.

Dita was in prison for her trade union activities for two years under the military dictatorship, and kept in jail for a further year after the dictatorship fell. She nearly died in prison, so she knows well enough that degrees of political liberty matter. She also knows such degrees of political liberty do not change the fundamentals of the exploitation of Indonesia's workers, who toil at some of the worst-paid and most insecure jobs in the world outside China. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the current president, was reckoned to be a leader, or at least a figurehead, of the movement for democratic reform against the military dictatorship.

However, according to Dita, "economically Megawati is just the same as Wahid. They both follow the policies of the IMF". Megawati is cutting subsidies on housing, electricity and education.

Politically, in Dita's opinion, Megawati's government represents a step back from Wahid's. "Wahid was more consistent about the rights of all sorts of minorities. The left had more space to produce propaganda and publish books. Because Megawati is not the kind of president Islam wants - she is a woman - she is closer to the military".

Dita's party, the PRD (People's Democratic Party), has two main slogans now - "Fight, or be poor", and "Not Megawati, not Wahid, not IMF, but a government of the poor". By "government of the poor", Dita explained, she means the same as socialists elsewhere have conveyed by the slogan, "workers' and peasants' government". A step forward, we thought, from the PRD's old slogan of a "democratic coalition government".

Dita is president of the independent trade union federation FNPBI, and spends most of her time in Indonesia travelling across the country to speak to workers' meetings, large and small. She is quietly level-headed about the state of the labour movement in Indonesia. The workers' disillusion with the politicians does not automatically produce militant organisation. The trade unions in Indonesia, she said, have been growing "in quantity, but not in quality". She explained that there are many new unions, but no corresponding rise, yet, in effective industrial action or in gains on wages and conditions.

Union disunity is a major problem. Dita's union federation is supporting a "forum" which aims at union unity, but sees no great results from it yet. Another problem is mass unemployment. "We are supposed to be going into a new recession now after the one in 1997, but for Indonesian workers the 1997 recession never ended".

The trade unions' main base is still in manufacturing industry, including Indonesia's many clothing and footwear factories which produce for export, often as sub-contractors to Western brand-name firms like Nike or Gap. Some of these factories are huge. One factory producing for Gap employs 7,000 workers.

Dita's union federation is trying to extend its base outside manufacturing to the public sector, services, and transport. It is often hard. For example, it is difficult to unionise bus drivers, because they work not for wages, but instead for a commission on the fares they collect, and so are locked into competition with other drivers.

Muchtar Pakpahan, the leader of another union federation in Indonesia, larger but less radical than Dita's - though Muchtar, too, was jailed under the military dictatorship - has talked about creating a broad workers' party in Indonesia, and referred to the example of the Workers' Party in Brazil. He formed a group called the "National Labour Party" for Indonesia's June 1999 elections, but it scored poorly and has faded away.

What did Dita think of this idea of a broad workers' party? "Mughtar Pakpahan wants a coalition party. As well as the workers, he wants the students in that party, which is fine - but also wants to have bosses in the party. That isn't possible. It would be a party of class collaboration". Dita is in favour of a "coalition party", so long as it is a coalition of different sections of the working class, not a coalition of opposing classes.

According to Dita, a whole series of socialist groups have emerged in Indonesia, mostly on the university campuses, since the end of the military dictatorship. Most of them, she thinks, do little to get out beyond the campuses and organise in the working class. But Dita's party, the PRD, is trying to develop collaboration with them.

Dita is obviously and rightly proud of the PRD's efforts to reach out from a student base and organise in the working class, but offers no empty self-congratulation. The PRD's members, she says, are still mainly students, and its membership is "stagnating".

She is straightforward about the split which the PRD suffered in late 2000. It was very difficult, she says. The seven leaders of the split were "very good cadres", some of whom had been in the party for a long time, and some of whom were her close personal friends. "They said that the PRD was not doing enough about women, which was right; and about Aceh, which was right too".

But, despite her matter-of-fact unpretentiousness, Dita has a strict view - which she evidently applies to herself, too - of the duties of a socialist party activist. Activists need to have patience with the party. "It is not enough for us just to say Aceh should be free. The cadres must understand. The cadres have to explain to the people why Aceh should be free, and they can't do that unless they have discussed it and understand it".

Aceh is an oil-rich region at the north-west tip of the Indonesian archipelago, where there is now a strong separatist movement. The Aceh question was more difficult to deal with than East Timor, said Dita, because Indonesia had invaded East Timor in 1975. "In Aceh there was no invasion. Most people in Indonesia say that Aceh should be part of Indonesia". It took time for the PRD to come to its present position of advocating a referendum on independence for the people of Aceh.

The break with the splinter group came, said Dita, because "they went against what we had decided and put into action. All our decisions were made through proper meetings. You have a discussion where everyone can say what they like, but as soon as the decision takes place, the party cadres must follow it. You can't say in the middle of the action that you don't agree".

We said our own rule, in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, is that after a proper decision a minority should respect unity in action, but need not and should not stop saying publicly that it disagrees, so long as it does that with sufficient restraint not to

disrupt the action. Dita was not sure about that, but felt that in any case the splinter group had failed to make any serious effort to build an alternative party. "To withdraw from the party for individual reasons - that's fine. Lots of cadres do that. But then you shouldn't use political reasons". The splinter group had withdrawn from being party cadres, and then one had got a job as a journalist, another as a consultant, a third had got a scholarship to the USA. Dita found it sad.

Though it was Ramadan and she wasn't fasting, Dita thinks of herself as a Muslim. She believes in God and sees good things in some passages in the Quran which she cannot see in the Bible. Some members of the PRD are Christians, some are Muslims, some are atheists. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, but Islamic fundamentalism has been weak there. The big avowedly-Muslim political movements, like Wahid's, are not fundamentalist. Islamic fundamentalism is still relatively weak in Indonesia - the university campuses, often, in other countries, the first terrain conquered by the fundamentalists, are still mostly influenced by the left - but it has become more assertive recently, especially since 11 September.

The PRD is now organising a self-defence force to protect its meetings and offices - not so much from the military and the police as from the fundamentalists, who, for example, attacked and broke up an international conference convened by the PRD earlier this year in Jakarta. Dita says that there are two sorts of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Indonesia - those who work with the military, and those who are opposed to the military. Both sorts are hostile to the left. How does the PRD counter the fundamentalists' agitation about the US/UK war in Afghanistan? "We explain that it is not a religious war, but an imperialist war". Dita saw the projected pipelines from the central Asian oil and gas fields through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the sea as central to the war. We disagreed. The USA has alternative pipeline routes - in fact, since 1998 the US company which had a deal with the Taliban to build an Afghan pipeline has abandoned that project, and US interests have mainly focused on a route through Azerbaijan and Turkey. The USA's conflicts over the pipelines are not with the Taliban - who readily signed up for the Afghan route - but with Russia and Iran, who, until other pipelines are built, control the flows from central Asia to the rest of the world. But Russia and Iran have been on the side of the USA in the war.

Dita did not cling to the pipeline theory, but she did insist the war has to be "more than just revenge". The USA, she argued, could not allow Taliban-type movements to grow unchecked, because it was becoming apparent that if they did, then they would eventually threaten such countries as Saudi Arabia, and the USA's core oil interests.

We ended the conversation by talking about international links between socialists. Dita sees the PRD's most important international connections as being with socialist groups in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Australia. But she wants a socialist common front internationally against neo-liberalism, IMF plans, and exploitation.

Ukrainian Workers' Tendency Appeal

SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORKERS OF
THE UKRAINE AND RUSSIA.

Exactly what was the U.S.S.R.? Was it socialism?

The relevance of this question to Russian and Ukrainian workers seems obvious to Workers' Liberty but it is only beginning to be freely formulated by small groups and individuals in these countries. Most of the western left literature on the subject is un-translated. The real language of Marxism itself, which the Stalinists drowned in blood and gutted of all meaning could begin to revive but not without our help. The few activists that there are in Russia and Ukraine are often unaware of the critical texts that deal with the rise of Stalinism. But there is a current of thought that is beginning to look sympathetically on the October Revolution.

The question why "Stalin?" must be raised. To study it; to begin to write and discuss the real history of the Russian Revolution is vital for the international labour movement but cannot even start if the original texts from the period are not available to study. Ukraine and Russia are described as atomised societies. This means there are individuals but no independent workers organisations. Many individuals in Russia are desperate for relevant original literature from the west. They are often surprised that anyone from the west is even interested, let alone that there is such a thing as critical Marxism. The texts translated could help to pull these individuals into groups. This is elemental and therefore vital work.

**Please make out cheques to 'Workers' Liberty'
indicating it is for the Ukrainian Workers
Translation Fund.
Send donations to P.O. Box 313 Leichhardt
NSW 2040**

Below is a copy of an e-mail from the Ukrainian Workers Tendency:

"How are you? What are your news? Everything is ok here, with except of terrible frost

We continue our job in "ordinary" regime. The book you sent to us is very important for our development and we're researching it even despite the language problems. We discussed the point, which works are the most important for translation at first. Under our opinion It should be following:

Shachtman's "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Russia", "Is Russia a Workers State?", "The Party We Need", "The Soviet Union and the World War". "Was Stalin's Army Red?" Draper's "The New Russian Empire". What do you think?

Comradely,
Pavel Kuftarev for Ukrainian Workers Tendency."

Socialists organise against oppression in Zimbabwe

Rosa Zulu, from the International Socialist Organisation in Zimbabwe, spoke to Workers' Liberty, in London about the crisis there in the run-up to the presidential elections on 9-10 March

On the whole it is not safe for us to do street sales with our paper any more, though we can still hold public meetings if we are careful about security.

The new press laws pushed through by Mugabe are going to make a lot of what we say very difficult to publish, because of course it is critical of the government.

The state is protecting the thugs of the ruling party, ZANU-PF. It is encouraging them. The top brass and those who run the state day-to-day are personal appointees of Robert Mugabe himself. Since the beginning of January, we have had four attacks on us. Two comrades have each been attacked twice. They were attacks on individuals, not attacks on our offices or our meetings. Three of the attacks seem to have been random. There was one instance in which a comrade was known to be a member of the ISO and was targeted for selling our paper in a neighbourhood near the city centre. When passers-by came to his aid, the attackers made false accusations against him. They took him to a police station, and now that case is before the courts. There is also some danger for us from the MDC [the Movement for Democratic Change, the main opposition party]. We live in the urban areas where the MDC has most of its support, so, with ZANU-PF and the MDC, we are between a rock and a hard place.

Most of the people in the top positions in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions are toeing the MDC line. A few toe the ZANU-PF line. But on the whole the ZCTU has fallen hook, line and sinker for the MDC line, which is that we must have peace before the election; the MDC will win the election, but there should be no action before the election. The MDC's economic policy - "The Bridge" - is neo-liberal, pro-privatisation, but it has not been publicised or debated much. The great tragedy is that most workers are not aware of the MDC's policies. They do not have an understanding of the MDC's policies. They just see the MDC as representing the hope of more jobs. The line is that ZANU-PF has failed to open up the economy properly; because of that we have inflation and unemployment; and neo-liberal economic policies will solve the problem. Advanced sections of the working class have become disillusioned with the MDC. We're working with those advanced sections of the working class in campaigns in some unions where

we have influence, the printing, engineering and construction unions.

We have been involved in the MDC on a united front basis. Because of the rightward shift of the MDC leadership, we have realised that there is no future in the MDC for any worker activists. We have shifted more to working with unions where we have an influence, and with rank and file trade unionists. Is there a chance of some unions breaking publicly with the MDC? Not in the short term, but in the medium to long term.

We are working in unions affiliated to the ZCTU to put pressure on the ZCTU leadership, but the aim is to build an independent rank and file trade union movement, independent of both ZANU-PF and MDC. The idea of a mass independent workers' party has no hearing at the moment. There is a high level of disillusion among the more advanced workers with what they have gone through with the MDC. We have to take a few steps back. We are saying "No to dictatorship" - meaning ZANU-PF - and "no to neo-liberalism" - meaning MDC. Both those parties represent one section or another of capital, of the bosses. We have to be prepared to fight whichever of the two comes into power. We must have no illusions in either. We haven't been advising people which way to vote. The advanced workers have been so disillusioned with the MDC that to advocate voting for the MDC would be suicide for us.

I think the presidential election will take place. All the authorities have done is to question Morgan Tsvangirai about his supposed plot to assassinate Robert Mugabe. If they decide to press charges, it will be after the election. I don't think they will want to risk a backlash from the MDC at this time. While there is disillusionment, the MDC has a lot of young members it can call on to take to the streets.

The activists of the MDC are still mainly working-class based, and it is also recruiting a lot of young unemployed people. The MDC has never really had any middle-class activists in it.

The whole economic situation appears to have worsened steadily with the neo-liberal policies of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, since 1990. Zimbabwe's acute economic crisis started, essentially, in about 1995. There was de-industrialisation. Capital moved its investments out of the manufacturing sector and into the financial sector where it could get quicker returns. Manufacturing's share of the economy fell from 32% to well below 20%.

And then what led to a rapid worsening of the crisis was when the government announced its plans to compensate war veterans, in 1997. Not long after that, the Zimbabwe dollar suffered the first of a series of crashes against foreign currencies. Inflation is now at 120%.

The MDC recommends a Marshall Plan type of recovery. But look at Argentina! Argentina has collapsed, and neither the World Bank nor the IMF has poured in money to help it recover. To expect that

sort of assistance for a country the size of Zimbabwe is day-dreaming.

What Zimbabwe is going through is a manifestation of an entire global economy in recession. There is no way out of this crisis using capitalist means. The state can revive the economy a bit by pumping out money, but then inflation will rise even further. There is only one way out of this crisis, not only in Zimbabwe but worldwide, and that is dismantling the whole system of capitalism.

The government has been threatening to take over companies which have been artificially creating food shortages, and turn them over to be run by the workers. But nothing like that has happened. Inscor, a major company, has been exposed for hoarding, but nothing has happened.

Despite all the hatred there is for him, Mugabe has built up a base of support in the rural areas through the land redistribution programme. In the process he has rejuvenated ZANU-PF. If you walk around the rural areas without a ZANU-PF party card which is at least nine months old, you risk getting beaten up.

Mugabe got his first layer of support through the war veterans, by giving them monthly payments. He then moved to the peasantry. The peasantry in Zimbabwe constitutes at least 60% of the population, and most of them have received land through the land redistribution programme. That is another layer of support for Mugabe. He has also has support in the army. The level of support for him in the police does not seem to be so strong.

We supported the land redistribution, but in a critical manner. The government has not been distributing the tools needed to work on the land - the ploughs, the seeds, and so forth. But in the short term we are not able to cut against ZANU-PF's base of support in the rural areas. The government has been providing drought relief in the rural areas, essentially free handouts of food. After the election it will be interesting to see how long those free handouts last.

The farm workers displaced by the land redistribution have been demanding a section of the land that is being handed out. Munyaradzi Gwisai, our MP [an ISO member elected to the Zimbabwean parliament on an MDC ticket], made a scathing attack in parliament on the government's intention to compensate the white farmers for their land, their infrastructure, and so on, but to give nothing to the farm workers. But some land has been handed out to the former farm workers, too.

What about the argument that the commercial farms should not be divided up, but maintained as larger units, with a higher productivity, and run as cooperatives under workers' control? That argument never got much hearing. The large commercial farms producing for export, and the large estates owned by multinational companies like Anglo-American, have not been touched. The farms which have been taken over are the smaller ones. 45 to 50% of the farms have not seen any redistribution at all. We say that the larger estates should be targeted - to be taken over and run collectively, not broken up.

One other argument we have been making is that the peasants should be allowed to use the land without title deeds. If you start dishing out title deeds, it plays into the hands of market forces. A peasant who is desperate for money will sell the land back to the commercial farmer. Title deeds should not be given out. The land should be made available to whoever chooses to use it.

But our paper is distributed only in the five urban areas where we have branches. It is too dangerous to try to distribute it in the countryside. With the crisis and the struggles that are bound to be erupting, and our very low level of resources, we have launched an international fund appeal so that we can get

equipment for the reproduction of material for our own comrades, and for our paper. That is being done through the Socialist Alliance. We also ask socialists in other countries to forward the updates we email out, and to publicise them, so that workers internationally can get the real story of what is happening in Zimbabwe.

- Donations to the ISO can be sent to the following bank account: First Direct Bank, 40 Wakefield Road, Leeds, LS98 1FO. Account name: John Page; sort code: 40-47-78; account number: 1118 5489.

- Please e-mail details of deposits to isozim@hotmail.com. * To receive email updates from the Zimbabwe ISO, send a request to isozim@hotmail.com.

South Africa: an alternative is within reach

An interview with Neville Alexander, Cape Town.

Neville Alexander spoke with Gerhard Klas from the German newspaper Sozialistische Zeitung, January 2002. Translated by Matt Heaney.

Neville Alexander, born in 1936, was interned as a political prisoner for eleven years on Robben Island due to his activities against the apartheid regime. Today, the Marxist academic and founding member of the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) is in charge of the Alternative Education Department at Cape Town University.

In this interview, Alexander says that in South Africa "there isn't any general system of state welfare benefits...it is almost exactly the same as during apartheid", and comments on the somewhat strained relations between the neoliberal ANC and their coalition partners the SACP and COSATU, and the possibilities of a new workers' party.

Question: South Africa plays a key international and negotiating role for the whole southern African region. Who profits from the foreign policies of the South African government?

Neville Alexander: South Africa is seen by above all Europe and the USA as an important partner in the economic development of the south of Africa. In the governing Alliance which exists between the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the trade union confederation COSATU, it is mainly the ANC which almost enthusiastically fulfills these expectations. Thabo Mbeki, the ruling President has, with his concept of the "African Renaissance", provided the superstructure for this. On the one hand, the African Renaissance programmatically sums up the regeneration of African culture, the economy, and political and social life. On the other hand, it creates a powerful structure in which, above all, the dominant

states south of the Sahara can take the political and economic initiative.

Mbeki and others claim that this programme will benefit all people in Africa, and above all the poor. But because it will be carried out within a capitalist and neoliberal model of society - and because it does not question this model - it will, first and foremostly, if not only, benefit the black or African middle class. The concept of the African Renaissance can be compared with South African "black empowerment", which basically means an increase in power for the black middle class. These programmes no longer have almost anything to do with improving the living conditions of the large majority of the population. Even today, the left inside the ANC claim that, actually, the unemployed, workers and the rural population benefit from black empowerment. But even they then add that it will obviously take a very long time before everyone something from these advances.

Question: Why was the South African government the only one in southern Africa that wanted to force through a new round of talks - against the interests of its neighbours - at the most recent ministers' conference of the World Trade Organisation?

Neville Alexander: That has something to do with the relative advantages of the South African economy when compared to neighbouring countries. The capitalist class in South Africa needs free trade, as pushed by the WTO. Not only within the countries of the southern African economic community (SADC), but in order to be able to penetrate the African continent. The North will only allow this if the South African markets are opened to them. The economic situation of the other countries in southern Africa does not grant them such a position. Unlike South Africa, most of them are at the bottom of the global economic scale.

Question: At home the policies of the ANC also encounter opposition. Has this led to a change in the relationship of the ANC to its Alliance partners in the government, i.e. the trade union confederation COSATU and the SACP?

Neville Alexander: The pressure from below has become so strong that the union leaders, and parts of the leadership of the SACP must openly attack the

ANC's policies. They haven't got any other option, as the political activists in their own organisations are highly dissatisfied because the promises of the post-apartheid era were not kept. More and more jobs disappear, and social conditions are becoming more and more precarious for a large section of the black population. The leadership of the ANC's partners must therefore take action against the ANC's policies, but on the other hand they leave escape routes open in case they want to change direction yet again. But there are, in particular amongst the trade unions, some exceptions in which the split with the ANC runs deeper: parts of the public service workers' union; the engineering union; the education union; and the union of chemical workers. Only in a few cases do the most well-known leaders speak out against the Alliance. Mostly they do this in private and don't say anything critical publicly.

Question: At the end of the 1990s the main thing [carried out by the unions] was to attack mass unemployment - the reasons for it were skimmed over. Today the privatisation plans of the government are the major focus of trade union mobilisation. Does this represent a new turn?

Neville Alexander: The main force here is the public service union. The employees in the largest service sectors such as telecommunications and electricity will also be effected by the government's privatisation plans. Many thousands of workers are threatened with redundancy and unemployment. COSATU has no other choice but to focus on privatisation. But one must also take a closer look, because the leadership does not oppose against privatisation as such. They are not against these sectors being viewed as "enterprises" and them being run according to managerial, businesslike criteria. They are merely against the [total] sell-offs to private companies and want the South African state to keep at least more than half of the companies' shares.

Question: Is there an extra-parliamentary opposition, which goes beyond the trade unions?

Neville Alexander: New extra-parliamentary campaigns continually come into existence. On the whole they are groups and organisations that exist on a regional level, mainly of working and unemployed people in the countryside and in the towns, who join together and become active against unemployment, as well as against deficits in services, e.g. against high charges for electricity and water supplies, which are simply cut off if the bills aren't paid. Others demonstrate against homelessness and develop models of direct action, as many are evicted from their homes because they couldn't afford to pay the rent any longer.

In South Africa there isn't any general system of state welfare benefits, only pensions and financial support for mothers exist. It is almost exactly the same as during apartheid. The consequences of the ANC's policies are similar for most of the population and they are faced with the only alternative, which is to organise for their own interests. This partly overlaps with the trade unions' campaigns against the government's privatisation plans.

Through this exists the possibility to launch a broad resistance movement against the effects of the neoliberal policies of the ANC government and this is already happening: in Johannesburg; Cape Town; Durban; on the North Cape; and most recently also on the Eastern Cape. In these places "Anti-Privatisation Forums" (APF) exist, which to some extent are led by the public service union, e.g. in Cape Town. But also independent campaigns, such as one to guarantee electricity supplies in Soweto, play a supporting role. The whole structures of these oppositional organisations and groups is very similar to those that existed during the fight against apartheid.

Question: Trevor Ngwane, the Chair of the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg, is described by some as the "Subcomandante Marcos" of South Africa. Others claim, he is a "false champion of the poor". Which is correct?

Neville Alexander: (laughs). He is an important personality. In particular because he comes from the ANC. He knows the ANC from inside and as a result began to criticise its policies, and as policies which are for the capitalist class, and directed against wage-workers. He presents his analyses in a simple, almost naive way, which are above all very effective at mass meetings. He also has a diplomatic proficiency which enables him to discuss with the South African finance minister Trevor Manuel at IMF or World Bank meetings. But until now he has played only an important role in Johannesburg, he isn't a national figure yet. The cooperation between different social movements is an example to follow, also thanks to Trevor Ngwane.

Question: The local organisations of the SACP also take part in the regional meetings of the APF. On the other hand, the SACP provides leading ministers, such as the Trade Minister Alec Erwin, who play a decisive role in the government's neoliberal policies. Can the SACP endure this tension?

Neville Alexander: Some members will leave the party anyway after a while. Obviously their loyalty to the party is deeply rooted, also for historical reasons. Therefore it is difficult to say exactly when it will come to a split. On the other hand, there are also quite banal and material reasons for remaining a party member, e.g. to protect their own livelihood. Many of those who really understand where these policies lead do not currently see any alternative. But is perfectly possible that these members would place themselves at the top of a new workers' party, together with other members of the left. This is not only a necessity for South African politics, I even believe that the time has now come to put this possibility to the test.

Question: In some townships, in Durban and in Cape Town, regional electoral lists have already materialised out of the APF, which in some areas have clearly overtaken ANC candidates. Are these the first foundations of a new workers' party?

Neville Alexander: I am of this opinion, as these lists are not made up of small, isolated currents. Many of these regional cooperations play a guiding role and consolidate the existing networks of social movements and political organisations. In Johannesburg it is being considered how these struggles can be spread on to a national level. The activists there have themselves not yet explicitly formulated that they want to form a new party, but the ANC has got there first by accusing them of wanting to do this. But the leading figures of the APF have dismissed this, though I am convinced that South Africa will, within the next two years, experience the founding of such a party.

Question: Does the ANC use repressive methods against the APF or others who criticise its politics?

Neville Alexander: Not through legal methods. But the ANC's critics are politically pushed to the side. There are also many ANC slander campaigns against its political opponents and it also uses its influence to, for example, remove financial support from them. But the plurality of South African society, and the contradictory interests in that society are so deeply rooted, that the ANC would have difficulties if it attempted to rule with openly dictatorial methods. The ANC government fears that a more aggressive course against its political opponents could lead to a situation resembling civil war and that this could also spread to organisations such as the Pan-African Congress (PAC) or the Inkatha Freedom Party. Their first principle is therefore that South Africa must become a country of political and economic stability that can attract foreign investors. They decided on this policy in 1993 and are now consistently taking it further.

Question: Which scenarios are possible if the ANC continues its policies and no meaningful political alternative evolves?

Neville Alexander: Then South Africa will become a country like Brazil or India, in which 60% of the population live in absolute poverty and are totally superfluous for the capitalist economy. One third of society will be able to lead a pleasant and good life, while two thirds vegetate.

Question: In your new book ["Südafrika", published in Autumn 2001 by Verlag C.H. Beck] you deal with the connections between colonialism, the development of capitalism, and the racist system of apartheid. Which consequences do these historical analyses have for the current situation in South Africa?

Neville Alexander: The economic relationships have barely changed. What we refer to as "racist capitalism" is deepening. Merely a few ten thousand black people will be raised into the middle classes. The capitalist system remains. Also, the leadership of the ANC has always accepted the race categories and now continues to divide the South African society into Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians. This consciousness of "different races" is especially supported and cultivated by the South African

government. That is one of the largest dangers that we are faced with on the level of the superstructure. If the material situation of the people continues to get worse, then a mobilisation of this [race] consciousness could have an extraordinarily dividing effect - as in other African countries, in which then genocide was carried out.

Reviews

The Fabric of Reality, by David Deutsch), Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, London 1997.
Reviewed by Riki Lane

Infinite Universes, Infinite Possibilities

Every instant, infinite numbers of universes are being created. Every possible decision you can make is made by a version of you in one or more of these universes. Reality is a multiverse, not a single universe.

That is the view that flows from quantum mechanics – the base of large slabs of 20th century technology and the theory that has produced more accurate predictions than any in the history of scientific thought.

David Deutsch is unusual for a quantum physicist, because he thinks we should accept this view as reality, not dismiss it as an obviously fictional account that just happens to make the mathematics work. For him, adequate scientific theories need an explanatory role, not just be able to make predictions about certain limited events.

Deutsch, in his book *The Fabric of Reality*, attempts to put together a world view based on what he sees as the best current theories in four quite different arenas – quantum physics, Popperian epistemology, computational theory, and evolution à la Dawkins. He gives a decent account of the basic ideas of these theories.

He argues that basing a world view on any of these is necessarily reductionist, but when they are combined that mistake can be avoided. "Emergent phenomena", such as the human race, no longer seem to be "just a chemical scum on a moderate sized planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies", as Stephen Hawking once put it.

He argues that each theory has an explanatory gap that can be filled by reference to the others. For example, computational theory argues that virtual reality generators can be built to simulate any physical phenomenon, including the human brain. But this rules out the possibility of free will.

However, he argues that the existence of the multiverse in quantum theory resolves this difficulty. In classical (pre quantum) physics, determinism rules. If you know the initial starting point, then you can predict everything precisely. So there is no free will.

Space-time already exists, past, present and future - when you make a choice it is already determined by everything that has come before.

However, in the multiverse, you do choose. The result of the choice is which universe you end up in.

Deutsch attacks the logical positivism of many scientists who adopt a pragmatic cynicism – they don't care at all what picture their theories make of reality, as long as they make the technology work. He also attacks the usual hierarchy of scientific thought: mathematics at the top, with its pure abstract proofs; then physics, with its clearly testable predictions on fundamental phenomena; then chemistry, biology etc until you get to the really unreliable psychological and social sciences. Philosophical thought is down the end here somewhere.

Yet the whole structure of scientific thought is itself a philosophical exercise, mathematics is limited by the assumptions it starts from (inevitably related to the physical world) and higher level emergent phenomena (e.g. life) cannot be explained simply in terms of fundamental physics. Deutsch is saying that we should take the best available scientific theories seriously and develop a world view based on them. This provides the basis for the development of better theories.

The book is well written, thought provoking and mostly pretty understandable. It presents a good argument against the extreme reductionism of many scientific writings. It is weak in the discussion of evolutionary theory and the objections to the strong adaptationist theory of Dawkins. As an attempt at synthesis of major strands of scientific thought, it gets away from the increasingly narrow specialisation and focus of most science today. The greatest lack is the near complete absence of any attempt to connect with social science – with the analysis of how human action changes the world in ways other than science and technology.

Cooperative collectivism

A New Democracy: alternatives to a bankrupt world order by Harry Shutt, London & New York, Zed Books, 2001

Reviewed by Ronald F. Price.

In only 161 pages of text, and in admirably clear language, Shutt, a former member of the Development & Planning Division of the Economist Intelligence Unit, describes what is wrong with our world and puts forward concrete suggestions for improving it.

His chapter titles indicate the scope of the book: the Waning of Imperialism; Capitalist Crisis and the Threat to US Hegemony; Corporate Interests versus Public Interest; the World Trade System: a Study in the Failure of Globalization; the Crisis of Underdevelopment: searching for a New Model; in Place of the 'Free' Market; the Transition to Supranationalism; and the Path to Democracy. Throughout he mentions facts which illuminate his argument, and though he does not go into detail his

treatment is an invitation to explore them further elsewhere. Three themes stand out: the failure to close the gap between the rich and poor countries; the growing environmental threats and the need for international agreements to combat them; and the inevitability of serious economic crisis because of the 'global excess capacity relative to weak effective demand'. Shutt is outspoken on the role of the USA. He speaks of it 'assuming the right' during the Cold War to overthrow governments 'deemed insufficiently amenable to US commercial and political interests'. In his final chapter he speaks of the US government, 'either directly or through the agency of the IMF and World Bank, [as] the world's principal subverter of Third World governments' sovereignty', though he sees the justification put forward for this now as different (the 'defender of Third World democracy').

Shutt is equally forthright about the problems of the Third World and the relations of the industrialised nations with them. Here he refers to Kwame Nkrumah, agreeing that these relations are 'essentially neo-colonialist'. An important point he makes is to question the viability of many of the states established on the ending of direct colonial rule (chap.5), and he questions whether the policies of aid donors allow the recipients to develop policies of self-sufficiency and genuine independence. He emphasizes at a number of places the need for global equity in living standards, and that for this we must 'establish the principle of permanent interdependence between rich and poor regions of the planet enshrined in some form of binding structure'. In chapter seven he links this with 'the model of cooperative collectivism which needs to replace the present one of globalized anarchy', a model which would 'both permit and require the dethroning of maximum growth as a crucial goal of economic policy'. In his chapter on 'Corporate Interests versus the Public Interest' Shutt begins by showing how people's everyday experience tends to reinforce capital's ideology, and he then goes on to undermine it. He has useful sections on 'Imperfect access to information' and 'Wasteful duplication of capacity'. In the latter, and elsewhere in the book, he notes how even right-wing governments have often gone against their own rhetoric and introduced state regulation. He ends the chapter by discussing the consequences of the 'chronic decline in growth rates which have occurred since the early 1970s', consequences which he believes, at some point and form, will lead to severe misery in the industrialised world. In view of John Howard's recent remarks at the World Economic Forum in New York, Shutt's chapter on 'The World Trade System' is particularly pertinent. He shows how, in the current situation of 'chronic global surplus of capacity' no country could risk the effects of 'free competition from imports' and, on the contrary, that many governments subsidize exports. He shows the link between current moves to free up trade and capital movement and threats to the environment, not to mention workers' rights and conditions in the Third World.

Shutt's final chapter on democracy brings together a number of his themes and shows what needs to be done to complete his alternative to "the 'Free'

Market", an alternative, as I mentioned above, he calls "the model of cooperative collectivism". Drawing attention to the "crisis of credibility" in "Western democracies" and again listing "Third World contradictions", he stresses the need for economic as well as political democracy. His final section is a

discussion of ways of "making government more representative and accountable". While specialists may argue with details, this is a stimulating book which provides a basis for informed and productive discussion. It deserves a broad readership.

Join Workers' Liberty in the struggle for socialism

Australian government seems to be able to give more and more powers to the police and the army, with only a few protests, and that this is very dangerous. Health and education should be a right for all, not based on privilege. The list of what is wrong with society and how things *should* be goes on and on.

What can we do? How to participate to make an impact?

Well Workers' Liberty has the view that these problems are because we live in a class society - the owners of private capital control what is produced, for whom and how. Governments make laws and run the state in such a way as to combine consent and coercion to this state of affairs where profit is the main criteria in decision making. So poverty is hard to challenge, since the exclusion of people from the right to work, from a decent education are seen as their own fault or inevitable features of a system to which there is no alternative.

But we think there is an alternative - that it is possible and necessary to make a society in which democratic collective decision making applies at every level, from schools, offices, factories - so that what work is done, what goods and services are produced are decided by the people who make and use those products. We could decide that we want to reduce greenhouse gases by making mainly vehicles for public transport, loads and loads of them, and cutting down on small vehicles, on car parks, on freeways and petrol consumption.

That is just a small example of what kind of decisions we think that people would make if there was real democracy, and not just the sham of voting in a parliamentary election every few years, whilst the big decisions are made in secret in the board rooms of large corporations and by government ministers and senior public servants.

We think that the people who can make these changes are the people who do the work, who have the jobs with these large corporations. The workers do sometimes organise, they get together and demand their rights, usually through trade unions. We think that the more that this happens, and when workers get together and discuss the bigger problems in the world, they can learn about the problems created by their bosses and the government and recognise that by standing up against that together, they could run production in a much better way themselves.

But what follows from this is that we think the most important things we can do right now are:

1. Organise ourselves around these ideas, this analysis, study, understand the facts and use our ideas to make sense of what is going on. We need to keep working on this understanding to be able to apply it to events and issues and explaining it to others. In Workers Liberty we read, write, discuss, learn, vote on our ideas, publish a monthly magazine and invite others to join with us.

2. We aim our main active work at trade unions and working class politics. We think that the unions are very conservative, but that active union members at least recognise the need for workers to be organised against the bosses. That is an important starting point. And that if the majority of working class people are going to be convinced that they can work together to change the world - then we have to put the case in the place where most active workers will hear it - in their unions.

3. We join in with other campaigns and activities - we go to demonstrations and meetings of various things, e.g. against the war in Afghanistan, anti-capitalist protests, for refugee rights, Socialist Alliance. The main case we argue here is for these campaigns to be based on the need for working class solidarity, to try to make links between campaigners with radical ideas and more conservative trade unionists and workers. We also argue against ideas which we think are confusing. A small example - we argued in the campaign against the war in Afghanistan, that we should also be clearly against fundamentalist terror, that just because the fundamentalists were anti-American did not make them on our side. In fact in Pakistan, Afghanistan, the middle-east the fundamentalists are anti-democratic, very oppressive of women and trade unions. We are for freedom and do not win it if we take sides with people who are against freedom, just because the US government is a common enemy.

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New Zealand Alliance may split

Dan Nichols

After more than ten years in existence, New Zealand's main "left of Labour" party, the Alliance, looks to be on the verge of a split. Most of its MPs, led by Deputy PM Jim Anderton, seem set to stand under a different name (or possibly even as Labour candidates) in this year's elections. The cause of this split has been the fact that the parliamentary party has backed the war in Afghanistan and the decision to send New Zealand SAS troops to fight in it. This put the Alliance MPs on collision course with the party's council led by charismatic former Auckland mayoral candidate, Matt McCarten. Now this has grown over into a dispute over where the MP's "tithes" (government money) should go, now that the parliamentary party are so at odds with the rank and-file. Trouble, however, has been brewing for a long time.

The Alliance was formed in 1991. Its major component was the "New Labour" group of MPs which, despite the Blairite name, left the New Zealand Labour party in protest at the breakneck programme of neoliberal reforms that it implemented during the late 80s. Anderton's group then teamed up with Mana Motuhake (a small Maori party), the Greens (who have since left to stand independently) and the Democrats (a petitbourgeois party) to form the Alliance. The party never gained any trade union affiliations, but it built up a good network of rank and-file union activists throughout the 90s. It also built up a big following amongst student activists by its support for the free education campaign that took place in New Zealand in the mid to late 90s.

Since the 1999 general election, however, the Alliance has proved to be a loyal coalition partner to PM Helen Clark's Labour party. The Labour/Alliance coalition government has more or less continued the same free market policies of the late 80s Labour government and its National successors. This has irked most of the party's rank and-file who expected it to put more pressure on Clark to deliver for workers and students. Alliance MPs have even kicked its student supporters in the teeth by voting against a Green sponsored parliamentary amendment to give students the right to claim benefit during the holidays. Anderton has recently even supported the decision of Trans Rail (New Zealand's privatised rail corporation) to stop running its only main line service on the country's South Island. Afghanistan was only really the straw that broke the camel's back.

New Zealand's left is in an appalling state. The Greens are now the only credible left-of-centre party and their main campaign is one in favor of a ban on any form of "genetic engineering" in New Zealand.

This campaign is supported by the country's largest "Trotskyist" organisation, the SWO (the New Zealand section of the British SWP's "international") who also see it as their chief area of work. However, this sort of "popular front" approach to politics by the organisation is hardly surprising as it is simply the old pro-Albanian New Zealand Communist Party in Cliffite garb!

It's not true that there is no class struggle in New Zealand, a national teacher's strike is due as this goes to press. But what the country lacks is an organisation willing to fight in the unions for those bodies to kick up a stink in the Labour party over their government's appalling policies. Independent working class challenges to Labour would also be a good tactic in most areas. This would be the only way out of the nightmare that the country's workers are now trapped in.

Politicus Interruptus

Uri Avnery, a maverick Israeli journalist, wrote the following article in February for the peace group *The Other Israel* ([www.http://members.tripod.com/~other_israel/](http://members.tripod.com/~other_israel/))

Last week, in Europe, I happened to pass a frozen lake. I was told that a few days before it was possible to skate on it. But the temperature had risen and the ice cover had started to melt. It still covers the whole lake, but in many places it can be broken with a stick. I was warned not to try to stand on it, because it might break, I would fall into the lake and disappear. But in a few days or weeks, I was promised, the ice would disappear and the beautiful lake would come to life again.

The situation in our country resembles this situation. The ice still covers the whole state, but it has started to melt.

The ice is the Big Lie told by Ehud Barak and his companions. This lie is starting to break. Soon nothing will be left of it.

When the bunch of bankrupt politicians returned from Camp David, they fabricated the legend, which has since become a holy truth, as if given by God at Mount Sinai. Like the Ten Commandments of Moses, there are Eight Facts of Barak: I have turned every stone on the way to peace; I have submitted offers unprecedented in their generosity; I went further than any Prime Minister before me; I have given the Palestinians everything they wanted; Arafat has rejected all the offers; Arafat does not want peace; The Palestinians want to throw us into the sea; We have no partner for peace.

If Binyamin Netanyahu had said this, it would not have had any impact. Everybody knows that Netanyahu is a crook. If Sharon had said it, he would not have been believed, because everybody knows that Sharon is a Man of Blood, unable to distinguish between truth and untruth. But when it came from the leaders of the Labor Party, those

eminent spokesmen for peace, it caused the collapse of the established peace movement.

Since then, many testimonies about Camp David have been published, including some by pro-Israeli American eyewitnesses. All of them show that Barak's proposals fell far short of the essential minimum for peace: end of the occupation, establishment of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel, giving up all the occupied territories (all in all 22% of Palestine under the British Mandate), returning to the Green Line (with the possibility of mutually agreed swaps of territories), turning East Jerusalem into the capital of Palestine, return of the settlers and soldiers to Israel, ending the tragedy of the refugees without damage to Israel.

When the Big Lie exploded, an alternative lie was put out: Some months after the Camp David talks were renewed in Taba, Barak's men made offers unprecedented in their generosity, gave the Palestinians everything, but Arafat Refused To Sign, which shows that he does not want peace, etc.

Now Moratinus, the European Union emissary for peace in the Middle East, has come along and buried this lie, too. The Spanish diplomat, who was in Taba but did not take part in the talks, has published a long and detailed report about what really happened there.

The clear conclusion is that at Taba the sides indeed came dramatically closer to each other. Gaps remained between their positions in almost all areas, but they were quantitative, rather than qualitative gaps. Clearly, if the talks had gone on for another few days or weeks, a historic agreement would have been achieved.

So what happened? Is it true that "Arafat Refused To Sign"? Not at all. Arafat did not refuse to sign. He wanted to continue the negotiations until there was an agreement to sign.

It was not Arafat who broke off the talks at this critical moment, when the light at the end of the tunnel was clearly visible to the negotiators, but Barak. He ordered his men to break off and return home.

Why? The Taba talks began after the outbreak of the second intifada. After Sharon's invasion of the Temple Mount with Barak's permission, and after seven Arab protesters were shot by Ben-Ami's police, bloody incidents occurred daily. The Taba talks were held "under fire" - a process that is quite normal in history. After all, negotiations are held in order to put an end to the fire.

On that day, two Israelis were murdered in a Palestinian town. The Palestinians said that this was revenge for the murder of a local leader. But it was enough for Barak to break off the talks.

What was the real reason? The answer must be found in the mind of Barak. After all, it happened to

Barak time and again: whenever he got close to an agreement, he withdrew at the last moment.

It started at the very beginning of his term of office. As will be recalled, he wanted to come to an agreement with the Syrians first, in order to isolate the Palestinians. Complete agreement was almost reached, when suddenly everything broke down. Assad wanted Syrian territory to extend to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, while Barak wanted the border to be a hundred meters away from the shore. Because of the hundred meters, Barak rejected the historic agreement that was at hand. (Comics say these days that Barak should have fixed the border at the shore line as it was then, as the sea has retreated many hundreds of meters since then.)

The same happened at Camp David. Agreement was possible. All the participants believed at the time that it was already close. Then something happened to Barak. As the Israeli participants testify (and as Arafat told me a few days ago), Barak simply freaked out. He cut himself off, did not shave and refused to meet even with his closest assistants.

Something similar happened at Taba. When the agreement was at hand, Barak ordered the talks to be broken off. The actual pretext does not matter.

When something like that occurs again and again, it raises questions. It may be called "politicus interruptus". A moment before the consummation, Barak draws back. I am not a psychiatrist and am not qualified to deal with mental problems. But I believe that every time, when Barak saw the actual price of peace in front of him, he shrunk back at the last moment. There was a dissonance between the price of peace (withdrawal from the occupied territories, evacuation of settlements, conceding East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, return of a symbolic number of refugees) and the ideas he was brought up on. He could not shoulder the responsibility and broke down. At the same time, he expanded the settlements at a frantic pace.

Adding sin to crime (as the Hebrew expression goes), he covered his personal collapse with the Big Lie, which caused a national collapse.

Now the lie is starting to break up. The open discussion of war crimes, the declaration of hundreds of soldiers that they refuse to serve in the Palestinian territories, the call of the reserve generals for an end to the occupation, the new voices in the media, the call of courageous artists, the big demonstration of 27 militant peace organizations (including Gush Shalom), the following big Peace Now demonstration - all these show that the ice is starting to melt.

This is only the beginning. Now is the time for all those who were waiting to join the effort. As Churchill said after the victory in Egypt: "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

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For more information about the march, please contact either:

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Amanda Tattersall on 0408 05 7779
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WORKERS' LIBERTY

Palestine/Israel: Two n ations, two states

Israel, the West bank and Gaza are a tiny areas of the eastern Mediterranean with a population about half that of the Australia.

Why is this Middle East conflict such a big issue, not only in the mainstream press, but in the discussions of socialists too?

There are two distinct peoples in the area, the Palestinian Arabs and the Israeli Jews. The Israelis have a secure, economically advanced state and First World living standards; the Palestinians on the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, living under Israeli occupation, have no state and the living standards of a Third World country.

Israel, which was created after the Second World War as a haven for Jewish people after the horrors of the Holocaust, has repeatedly come into conflict with the Arab states which surround it. Following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip - all areas with a Palestinian majority - and has stayed there ever since.

The conflict in Israel-Palestine has claimed thousands of lives and had political repercussions across the world - but particularly in the Muslim world, where many see the oppression of the Palestinians as a symbol for the treatment of underdeveloped Muslim countries by the developed West. Socialists everywhere have quite rightly felt sympathy for the Palestinians' struggle. But socialists are divided on how the conflict can and should be settled.

Like the Arab states, the Palestinian nationalist movement which came into existence after 1967 refused to acknowledge that the Israel had the right to exist. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) called for the creation of a single state in the whole of Palestine, where, they claimed, Jews and Arabs would live in equality.

Although this sounds good in theory, it could only have been created through forcibly subduing the Israeli Jews.



In 1987, when the Palestinian people launched a mass uprising against the occupation (the intifada), the PLO changed its demand to the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Two states - meaning that the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews would recognise each others' right to exist in separate states - is the only basis on which Jewish and Arab workers in the region will ever become united enough to fight for socialism. But, bizarrely, much of the left has continued to cling to the Palestinians' old demand of a single state in the whole of Palestine.

All too often, socialists descend into demonisation of "the Zionists" (i.e. Jews) and a sort of borrowed Arab nationalism. They view things not in terms of the compromise and mutual recognition which are integral to a democratic solution, but in terms of 'good' and 'bad' people (good Palestinians and bad Israelis). This attitude has nothing in common with the socialist approach - what Lenin called 'consistent democracy'.

Workers' Liberty is almost alone among socialist groups in supporting the PLO's policy - a two state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In campaigning for such a solution, we hope not only to re-educate the left, but also to make some small contribution to helping Jewish and Arab workers in Palestine unite in the struggle for socialism.
