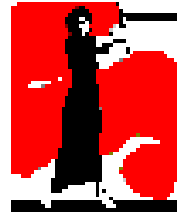


# Workers' Liberty



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

No.16 May 2001

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## May Day — International workers' day.



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# May Day — International workers' day.

By Janet Burstall

May Day has been pretty quiet in Australia for a long time. This is the first time that large May Day activities have been organised on the actual day, rather than on the first Sunday of May. People who thought that the USSR was socialist had control of May Day committees for years organised it around whatever slogan suited the Soviet Union, usually some version of "big power det'ent". A solid few union activists and socialists who challenged the idea that the USSR was socialist also joined in. But it was not inspiring. The best May Day in recent decades in Australia was 1998, in a huge show of solidarity with the MUA wharfies. A serious struggle by workers can rally many supporters.

Where workers engage in large-scale class struggle, they inevitably raise the question of who owns and controls the social wealth, the means of production. This points to a definite answer — that the means of production should be owned in common, and their use democratically controlled for the common good rather than being governed by a destructive and greedy competition to expand the already-mammoth wealth of rival profiteers.

## May 1 - the working class is not dead!

We, who are on the streets for May Day, know that we are not the rich and powerful, we are not the big end of town, we are not the big-time gamblers in the stock exchange casino, we are not the ones living in multi-million dollar waterfront mansions, we are not on the boards of directors of the big companies, we are not the ones who can decide what should be produced, or who will be allowed to earn a living by producing it, or in which country it will be produced. We are not the ruling class.

Many working class people who are not joining May Day in 2001 know this too, but they still think that they are middle class, or don't even consider that class as relevant to their lives. The lie has been perpetrated — that the working class is dead.

So consider this:

There are more than 2.8 billion wage workers in the world (World Bank 1997):

550 million work in industry

850 million work in services

1.4 million work in agriculture

City dwellers comprise about 40% of the population of low to middle-income countries, and 77% of the population of the high-income countries.

In addition to wage workers is the informal sector of workers, people like clothing outworkers, tradespeople, taxi-drivers: 40-65% of the urban workforce in Asia and Africa.

There are more than 164 million trade unionists worldwide (International Labour Organisation, 1995).

Compare this to England and Wales in 1867, the most industrially developed area in the world when Marx published *Capital*. Only 17% of working-age people were employed in industry, i.e. 1.7 million people and *there were only 250,000 trade unionists*.

Trade unions are growing fast. In just 10 years, 1985-1995:

South Korea 61%

In Thailand 77%

South Africa 127%

## Anti-capitalism and May Day

The anti-capitalist movement in Australia and other countries has chosen May Day as a day of anti-capitalist global action.

Quebec City, Davos, Prague, Melbourne, Seattle have all brought the anti-capitalist movement to the developed countries. These cities have all hosted meetings of the World Trade Organisation or the World Economic Forum. The protests have focussed on obstructing these bodies from meeting and making decisions that are in the interests of global capital rather than the working class and its allies. Slogans raised by some sections of these protests are "Abolish the IMF, WTO and World Bank", and to cancel third world debt.

These slogans clearly have a mobilising power, but they express a deeper sentiment that is against the whole capitalist system. But the realisation of these slogans will not abolish capitalism for a number of reasons. They limit the focus of protests to a set of consultative bodies for managing capitalism but without which capitalism could still continue to survive. The issues these bodies are dealing with and which the protestors are trying to obstruct, are primarily trade issues. The core of capital's weakness is not trade but at the points of production. It is the people who make the goods and services that capital trades without whom capital cannot survive.

## Trade unions and the anti-capitalist movement

The anti-capitalist movement is more militant, more radical and more energetic than the workers' movement: the trade union movement. Many in the anti-capitalist movement are working class people, but are not necessarily joining in with the movement from a working class perspective. They may have judged the union movement as an ageing dinosaur in contrast to the youthful nimble-footedness of the anti-capitalist movement, and see in it the possibility for socialist solutions to our problems. They may not recognise the central long term importance of solidarity amongst fellow workers to building a movement that can replace the power of global capital. They may overlook the potential of organised labour and the strength of working class loyalty and camaraderie, because they see only the institutionalised role and the politics of most union leaders bound to the system, and binding the class to the system unnecessarily. Anti-capitalist activists who also take up the role of labour movement activists will be the ones who

help to recreate the radical energy of the Australian working class.

Trade unionists who do want to re-energise the movement, to commit it to a clear and militant platform of class struggle, can find allies and inspiration in the anti-capitalist movement. In some cases, notably the CFMEU leadership in Sydney, this will mean going against officials who seem to mistrust the radicals in the anti-capitalist movement, and protect their own positions by trying to segregate their members from some sections of the anti-capitalists. This is why there are separate May Day activities in Sydney, on May 1. There is also the 'official' May Day on May 6.

In Melbourne, Trades Hall has been ambivalent about the anti-capitalists. When the trade union march at S11 (actually on S12) was officially *not* meant to join the blockade of the Crown Casino, many unions, including the AMWU, did organise blockade contingents nonetheless!

Segregation is damaging to both sides of the movement — we need not only maximum solidarity and links between the two movements, but we also need free and open discussion of ideas and the way forward. Let's join together to increase our powers!

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# Australian workers face corporate global giant

By Janet Burstall

**A** global corporation might close one of its factories employing 4000 workers. Those workers know this. The futures of 4000 workers and their families are for others to decide, others who are unaccountable to these workers or to anyone else, unaccountable to any franchise other than their major shareholders. The decision is likely in August 2001.

The corporation is Mitsubishi. The factory is the Elizabeth car plant in Adelaide. Thousands more people work for businesses in South Australia supplying parts to Mitsubishi.

The corporation is lobbying for government concessions knowing that the government will be desperate to avoid the fallout of so many jobs lost.

The Elizabeth workers and the unions that represent them will be hoping that the government will offer sufficient concessions to Mitsubishi to save their plant. Many will be questioning the value of the job-saving strategy that has been used in response to previous closure threats - agreeing to increase their productivity by working harder. Already 600 white collar workers have lost their jobs.

The workers will by now be reluctant to trust company promises of security, if only they work harder still. Some workers will want to stand up to fight. Others might find the chance of a redundancy package an appealing escape from the whole set-up. It could come down to giving up jobs and instead negotiating redundancy and retraining packages, if the unions trust Mitsubishi to pay up on entitlements.

## Car industry worldwide

The car industry has been restructured around the world, and in Australia over the last 2 decades. In Australia thousand of jobs have been lost in closures of car plants in the last 20 years, including Ford at Homebush and Holden at Pagewood. In Europe car workers have fought and lost on jobs and closures, following the unions' traditional path of protest, letting off steam and then submission.

The contrast is in Korea, where Dae Woo workers have been occupying their plant since February, in a heroic fight against takeover and closure by General Motors. **(see separate story p5)**

Mitsubishi might keep Adelaide working if there is a big enough bailout package by the government. But then Mitsubishi will reconsider again at the end of the line of the next model. Whether or not there is a short-term reprieve,

Mitsubishi workers will need to think ahead about a viable future for their work and their livelihoods.

## A new approach

Closures caused thousands of workers to lose jobs at BHP's Newcastle steelworks in the 1990s and Newcastle dockyards in the 1980s. The strategies of limited industrial action, and negotiations with owners and governments to save operations failed in both cases. A completely new approach will be needed by the Adelaide workers in order to save their own livelihoods. Such an approach is made more possible by the advent of the new anti-capitalist movement.

This might sound unlikely - the Mitsubishi plant produces cars, petrol-drinking, carbon dioxide-emitting, greenhouse-effecting cars. Many of the environmentalists who are a significant part of the anti-capitalist movement wouldn't be too fussed if the car industry went down.

## Green support for car workers?

But - there is a chance that the workers at Mitsubishi could help the environment by challenging the right of Mitsubishi to cause excessive consumption of carbon fuels and emission of greenhouse gases. They could decide to counterpose a plan for producing socially useful vehicles, public transport, and less environmentally damaging vehicles, not subject to the profit requirements of Mitsubishi. This is not an easy path, it would require a huge amount of commitment and self-confidence from the Mitsubishi workers in the first place, and then an enormous effort of solidarity from around the country. The chance for this would be strengthened if the anti-capitalist movement extended solidarity to the Elizabeth workers. But imagine the benefits from an environmental perspective, if car workers could spearhead a campaign to produce public transport to reduce car ownership, reduce the time needed to be spent on vehicle production, make more durable and fuel efficient vehicles and so also reduce their own hours of work and intensity of work. Win, win! (The only loser is the profit-taker Mitsubishi).

The anti-capitalist movement was bold and brave at S11 in Melbourne challenging the right of global corporations to make decisions affecting other people. The M1 rallies around Australia are the next show of strength. There is a chance that this movement could help the workers at Elizabeth to challenge Mitsubishi's right to decide whether or not they

have a livelihood, or the terms and conditions of their livelihood.

Some of the workers at Elizabeth do want to take up the challenge of fighting Mitsubishi's right to decide exclusively about their livelihoods. The AMWU has organised delegate workshops to plan a campaign against closure, though we do not know what options have been considered. Can the rest of the union movement offer Elizabeth workers the political solidarity necessary to win the fight to save jobs? Will the new anti-capitalist movement be ready to mobilise?

Will the Mitsubishi workers be wondering if a victory for them might be the same kind of victory as that won by the MUA in 1997, one that is followed by increased injury rates due to intensified work and disregard for health and safety issues, hundreds of jobs lost and increased casualisation? Some victory.

### **Workers Liberty proposes**

A starting point for developing an effective fight and solidarity to save jobs at Mitsubishi Adelaide.

#### **Demands:**

1. Save jobs, no sackings, no more speed-ups.
2. A worker/community/environmentalist plan for environmentally sound transport.

#### **Actions**

1. Make the links now between Mitsubishi workers, the rest of the trade union movement in Adelaide, the anti-capitalists, the greens and the wider community. Activists and delegates should seek each other out and openly discuss the options and canvas for solidarity prospects.
2. Maximum democracy in the campaign, to maximise the prospects for solidarity and to show the alternative to closed,

unaccountable decision-making. For open committees to run the campaign. All negotiations with Mitsubishi to be made public, no agreements to be made without thorough discussion and voting. (Remember the loudspeaker broadcasts of negotiations to the Gdansk Shipyards during the Solidarnosc strikes in Poland in 1980?)

3. The campaign committees to be ready to support workers refusing to leave the plant, if there is any threat of closure or sackings.

4. Put nationalization of the car industry back on the political agenda of the Left, exerting pressure on our union leaders to represent workers' interest better and more comprehensively.

It is firstly up to the workers at Elizabeth to decide. It will take a lot of guts and trust to choose such a path, to break with the pattern of unions copping the job losses, to challenge the whole framework in which corporations deal with workers. But if the Elizabeth workers decide, we'll need a solidarity movement that combines that shown for the MUA, with that expressed at S11/M1, and then double it.

### **Bailing out the company?**

What Mitsubishi has already been offered:

Federal Government car industry tariff reduction compensation scheme 2000-2005 - \$200million

South Australian Government loan over 10 years, if Mitsubishi commits to a model to replace the Magna - \$20million

Mitsubishi wants more:

Delay in the 5% tariff reduction scheduled for end of 2004.

Lowering the amount of Australian made content required in vehicles.

## **Fighting closure of a car factory - the militant way**

**G**eneral Motors wants to buy the Dae Woo Pupyong Plant in Korea. When Dae Woo sacked 1750 workers on 17 February, the workers occupied the plant until work resumed on March 7. The factory became a "martial law" area, with more than 2,000 riot police stationed throughout the compound. The workers could not reach their union office in the plant.

On March 7, the union filed for a court injunction against the obstruction of union activities and entry to the union office. On 10 April the court ruled that the company must allow the workers access to their union. Five hundred dismissed workers marched to the plant amid cheers. But when the workers tried to reach the union office, they were met by 400 police, joined by reinforcements.

### **Police officer "totally speechless"**

According to a news report by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions <<http://www.nodong.org/english>> "What ensued for about three hours was a carnival of blood thirsty violence and total disregard and disdain for law, legal rights, and human rights by the government of a Nobel Peace Award laureate president." The police chief in charge of beating up the workers had justified the operation saying that "the order of the Kim Dae-jung government takes precedence over laws."

"At the "end" of the "incident"-filled day, 14 unionists were hospitalised for various heavy injuries, such as, broken nose, broken rib, broken bones in hands, and partial paralysis. But, virtually all of the unionists were beaten up in varying degrees."

"When the scene of the police atrocity, captured on video, was made public, even some police officers expressed deep shame. One police officer, responsible for keeping a watch on the KCTU headquarters, said, "I am totally speechless"."

### **The betrayal of democratic rights**

The Korean Metal Workers' Federation is now questioning the basis on which KIM, Dae-jung, President of South Korea won the Nobel Peace Prize "in praise of his long commitment for democratic movement against military dictatorship in Korea". "This was only possible because there were mass supports from workers and students who were ready to die for democracy and human rights. If there were no support from the people and workers, it was not possible for him to get the prize. However, things have been changed. He is no human rights defender any more. He is more like human rights breaker to

Korean workers and students. Still hundreds of trade union leaders and strikers have been oppressed and jailed. He put twice as many workers and students in jail than the other dictators did in the past."

The Korean union movement has not so far tackled the problem of political representation for workers, independent of bourgeois democrats. But this bitter experience and their shattered hopes in Kim, Dae Jung show that the Korean working class and students do need to move beyond industrial militancy to political organisation.

#### **The workers demands:**

1. Arrest LEE Mu-Yong, Chief Police who ordered the violence against peaceful demonstrators.
2. Respect the Court Order which allows workers to use their union office
3. Free all detained workers and drop the warrant of arrest of Daewoo autoworkers
4. Compensate for the injured
5. Reinstatement of 1,750 Daewoo autoworkers
6. NO sale to GM and NO close of Pupyong plant

#### **Solidarity from Australian workers**

There have been demonstrations against Dae Woo and the Korean government organised by unions in Sydney, and several motions of solidarity including NSW Labor Council, VTHC, the AMWU and CFMEU.

Kim Il-sup, Secretary of the Daewoo Motors Labour Union asks for donations:

Bank : Chohung Bank  
Account : 938-04-179123  
Name : An Mi-jeong  
BIC-Code : chohkrse

#### **A defeat for Rio Tinto**

Rio Tinto has been ordered by the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) to reinstate 16 coal mineworkers at Blair Athol, sacked in July 1998, with full back-pay. The Commission found that the 16 members of the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division were victims of a company-sanctioned conspiracy. The Commission also confirmed the existence of a secret 'black list' used to victimise the 16 workers and ruled that their retrenchments were not merit-based.

The Union is still fighting other unfair dismissal cases against Rio Tinto, 110 workers at its Hunter Valley No.1 and 80 workers at Mount Thorley mines in NSW. The Blair Athol decision offers hope to those workers and their families. But we should not just rely on the courts to support those sacked. The unions need to begin stoppages to ensure victory.

## **"Fix it or nix it"? A false dilemma!**

By Melissa White

Three separate strands of description have emerged in the past six months in Australia to define the collective intention of that group of people that blockaded the Crown Casino at S-11 and that will blockade the capital cities' stock exchanges on M1. The hard left naturally defines this collection as "anti-capitalist". The populist left and the populist right describe the collection as "anti-globalization" (the description, incidentally, that the mass media exclusively promotes, refusing ever to mention the other two descriptions). It is the expansionism of capital that is the problem, according to these anti-globalisationists, and the left contained in this current betrays its internationalist principles accordingly. The third description comes from the reformist left, who defines the movement as "anti-corporate". For this reformist part of the left, it is big corporations who are to blame, and the reformists separate out those big corporations from the social system that enables them to flourish in the first place and identify them as the cause of the problems.

These different descriptions belie different politics. We must resolve these differences if these three descriptions are not to harden and their proponents to fall back into their own

separate politics. That resolution will take one of two forms. Either we will remain (and further develop) as a united front: the differences will remain, but we will strike as one for better or for worse, and we will eventually find the scope of things that we can agree to strike on in action. In that case, the movement will come to be recorded in history as an unusual epoch of "summit-hopping", and we had best start saving up in order to purchase a Concord jet to transport ourselves around the world more easily to attend all the summits. In our own country, Peter Boyle of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) has circumvented the need to purchase a jet by already proposing the continuation of the summit-hopping strategy as a form of the united front: a mass encirclement and possible blockade of Parliament House (isn't bourgeois democracy better than no democracy?) on September 11. The symbols flow — the capital city as the heart of state power, the anniversary of S-11 in Melbourne... Unfortunately, the encirclement does not quite cut it as stand-in for the storming of the Winter Palace.

Nevertheless, whilst parliament is no summit, the DSP regard it as a sign of the "maturity" of the movement that it can set its own demonstrations independently of summits

and the trade union leaders. That might be so, but moving hither and thither across Australia to the symbolic sites of the country may amount to little more than the international heraldry of the movement. Capitalism, however, is a social relation between classes. It is not any particular building, but all buildings, whether particularly grotesque and ostentatious like the Casino, or prosaic and austere like Parliament House. It is not any particular capitalist, but all capitalists, whether nice like Dick Smith or a right bastard like Kerry Packer.

### Organised working class

The second option is that the movement links itself to the organized working class. That is the option Workers' Liberty argues for. So far the anti-capitalist movement has found some agreement on courses of action and successfully continues to do so — and this might be improved through the Socialist Alliance too — but as yet it has found no political agreement that will sustain it past the next action or the next election. Each new action is not in itself useless or fruitless. But nor is each new action in itself the most useful or fruitful. As Marxists, Workers' Liberty supporters argue for the maximal socialist expenditure of socialist energies. That means approaching and adjusting the mobilizing features of the movement to the demands of the working class.

There is of course a third option: that, *yet again*, the ad hoc alliances we've formed crack up and fall apart. So these differences should not be taken lightly, nor should they be submerged in a frenzy of summit-hopping. We do not want to fall apart. What to do? Let's take a case in point of this political disagreement that besets us, and how it may be resolved with the application of this second strategy.

In the last Workers' Liberty newsletter we reported that over 150 activists met at a conference on 24 March sponsored by the Sydney "M1 Alliance" which was attended by anti-capitalist activists of various persuasions, and with large mobilizations of the DSP and ISO. The opening plenary, entitled "Fix it or Nix it?" was a strange affair. This question — whether to "fix" or to "nix" — refers to which specific demands the new anti-capitalist/corporate/globalization movement should make in relation to the institutions of global capitalism. Should we demand that they be reformed or that they be demolished altogether? In that session, Dr Patricia Ranald from the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINet) argued the "fix it" case. She debated against Alison Stewart, ISO member and editor of *Socialist Worker*, who argued the "nix it" case. Patricia competently outlined the reformist's case. For example, she would like to see "alternative trade rules" to be implemented with a strengthening of a "no disadvantage" test for third-world countries. Whilst these might be fine intentions, they are not good enough to solve the problem of wage-slavery, world poverty and environmental destruction.

For instance, AFTINet notes in its latest bulletin (No. 16, April 27, 2001) that the Canadian International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) seek reforms to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by strategizing against the investor-state chapter, seeking to campaign against foreign investors' rights to challenge domestic nation-states' powers to legislate and regulate trade. Says Senior Advisor Aaron Cosbey of the IISD (which is prominent at the moment because of the Quebec City Summit of the Americas and anti-capitalist riots): "Certainly we strive for increased investment and economic growth, but we also want environmental integrity, human health and safety and

scores of other non-economic goals. The problem with the Chapter 11 cases to date is the [NAFTA] tribunals have been unable to find that kind of balance. They've promoted increased investment, but with terrible consequences for the environment." The IISD will oppose the removal of regional trade barriers in May next year which will help to finalize an FTAA agreement by January 2005, and the accord would come into force as early as the end of that year. The free trade area would be the world's largest trading bloc, covering 800 million people and one third of total world economic output.

AFTINet is a useful resource for socialists. It co-ordinates the release of information about the activities of Non-Government Organizations. But the problem is that it views NGO's as lobby groups that can achieve "realistic" limitations on free trade out of control in order to provide "balance" between economic growth and adverse environmental and social effects, *assuming in advance that these interests were compatible*. It is no surprise that the free trade that is enforced by the World Trade Organisation in return for modernization assistance takes advantage of uneven development! The growth that they promote is not compatible with life and humanity. And so the real downside of Patricia's argument was that it was the reformist's case.

### Who is to "nix it"?

But Patricia's failures do not to make the ISO the victors by default. Whilst Alison Stewart adroitly tore apart the "fix it" case with her example of the absurdity of 'accepting' the deaths of 12 million children instead of 19 million — the reformist is left to pull a number out of her head and call it "practical" as rationalization for its arbitrariness — she, herself, proved unable to outline any actual argument for the "nix it" case. Or, rather, a rationalizing opportunism disguised as an argument was put and which made no sense to boot. The fundamentals of that argument were: given that the movement was brought together and mobilized in Seattle, Melbourne, (and we might now add Quebec City) etc around the *objections to the policies of institutions such as the WTO*, the demands about those global decision-making bodies that we make must be in reference to the *origins of that mobilizing potential*. All right as a psychological description of what made people get out of bed for S-11, but consider the substance of the demand to "nix the WTO". How can it work? Who is to nix it? Should the WTO nix itself? Should the 'nice' bourgeoisie call on the 'mean' bourgeoisie to nix it? Should the small capitalist a.k.a. "the people" call on the big capitalist to nix themselves? Should the workers nix it? Should anti-capitalists such as us nix it?

The peculiar thing was that upon questioning the "nix it" solution, the answer received from Alison was "none of the above". Alison made no pretence that she actually called on *anybody* to nix it. After all, that was just a propaganda slogan that "fit the new mood" of the movement at the moment. Ever the philosophers of the movement, the ISO apparently see fit to describe an operative concept instead of make a suggestion about how to implement it. Better to overshoot the mark and miss completely than to face the fact that the agency required to fulfill such a demand — the working class — is absent altogether until it is made to come alive by convincing its members to isolate and remove what oppresses them.

So the task of the day, says Alison, is to call for the abolition of those institutions. But what understanding of the WTO does such a utopian demand rest on? Those

institutions represent the higher degree of global organization and unity of the nation states' ruling classes — a worrying new feature of the composition of the capitalist class — but Alison seems unperturbed by the logical conclusion of her position that would allow the movement to call for the abolition of banks too: after all, they too are capitalist institutions holding the centralized surplus-value generated off the back of the working class and lending it out to workers at a tidy profit. From a different angle: given the political arbitrariness of calling for the abolition of WTO, wasn't that demand, then, conceding a lot of ground to Patricia Ranald's position? Wasn't it equally reformist? If the entailments demonstrated that it was equally sensible to call for the abolition of banks, then why call for the abolition of one section of capital and not another, based merely on the degree of its refinement? Isn't it the transformation of the social surplus into capital that is the problem? Alison gave up the games and revealed the master-plan.

The call to "nix the WTO" was part of a strategy to mobilize people according to what they wanted to hear (noticeable absence of account of how it *had* been decided by the ISO that this is what they wanted to hear: yet again an example of the homogenization of the whole human race as a universal sounding board for a good slogan). In practice, the movement should go to all the various community and worker campaigns that now exist and peddle this slogan.

Then one day, once enough people agreed with it, that chorus would transform into world socialist revolution.

I put it to Alison that nobody except capitalists disputes the ability of the WTO to wreak massive damage, and that such a question about the degree of refinement was not supposed to be facetious. But that if we suppose the dilemma as one stretched over two poles — reform or abolition — then we have lost the ability to form socialist demands that are determined by our present powers, and accordingly we might lose the opportunity to preserve what we've got now and the opportunity to grow and become a forceful socialist movement. *Of course* if everyone was calling to "nix the WTO" then half the struggle would be won since everyone calling for it would already be convinced of radical conclusions. But we need some steps between how to get from here to there. We need to devise a strategy for how that transition can occur. Further, the abolition of the centralization of surplus is *undesirable* (if that is what the ISO actually means) as a demand of socialists! Socialists must want that surplus to be distributed *back* to the class that produced it and according to democratic principles. And so the call for the abolition of the WTO makes no sense unless it is accompanied with a workers' plan for reconstruction and distribution. It is the working class who should replace the WTO. Just as the capitalist class gets organized and global, so must we. We must match them step for step.

## Organise for solidarity

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

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

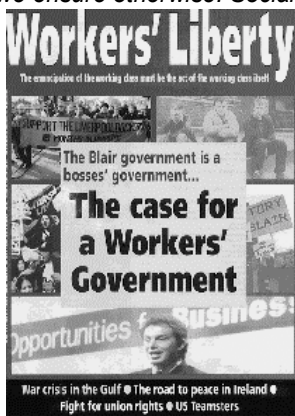
*Both newly-involved workers and long-time activists can learn immense amounts very quickly in big struggles. The struggle itself points us towards solidarity. But the political ideas needed to win socialism cannot all just be improvised on the hoof. And lessons will be un-learned unless we ensure otherwise. Socialist organisation is necessary as **the memory of the working class** — as a structure which each other's experiences. The class economics and politics, but also on the*

*There are many organisations many of them could best be **united in a structure**. But that cannot be done the new activist do, in the face of this often*

*The same as you would do faced with a when you have a stubborn sickness, osteopathy, herbal medicine, or faith get together on the question of cures?" out. The same goes with politics: **examine carefully check what they say against see whether what they do in practice***

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

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



*allows activists to learn from history and from struggle has to be fought not just on the fronts of terrain of ideas and theories.*

*proclaiming the goal of socialism. In our view **single organisation**, with an open, democratic overnight or at our behest. What, then, should confusing variety of groups? choice of schools, or of methods of healing Offered conventional treatment, acupuncture, healing, you would not say: "Why don't they all You would investigate, read, and check them **the programmes** of the different organisations, 'common sense' and basic Marxist theory, and corresponds to what they say in words.*

*working class left in a single organisation, one*

# Redistributing income and regulating capitalism?

By Janet Burstall

"How can we reverse the processes by which income is redistributed from labour to capital?" is one of the questions Frank Stilwell puts as a discussion starter on globalisation for the Now We The People project web site.

Frank Stilwell is Associate Professor of economics at the University of Sydney. He is one of the best known critics of current government economic policy, and of orthodox economics. He puts forward the need for more government intervention, including a more comprehensive strategy for industry, trade and regional development and for policies to reduce income inequalities. Frank Stilwell's economics are influential on the left of the labour movement too. So, what does he have to say?

The discussion questions at the end of each section are Dorothy Dixers, in the way they are worded, and in terms of information and arguments provided first. If much critical examination of other possibilities emerges from this discussion, it will only be if some very committed people put them up. The section on industry for example, is aimed at the idea of a regulating, interventionist economic policy for a social-democratic government *within* an undisturbed system of private ownership. Stilwell is silent on the industrial relations implications. Industrial relations would still have to be "managed" by an [allegedly] independent state, and the prerogative of private ownership must prevail over working class demands and interests. All that can be won is sops that the industrial courts judge can be accommodated by companies.

## A new incomes policy?

The first question on incomes asks "How can we reverse the processes by which income is redistributed from labour to capital? Is a new incomes policy necessary?"

"A new incomes policy", in the light of the last incomes policy, the Accord, and the effect that that had in holding wages down - is not a heartening prospect. Stilwell provides statistics on the widening gap between rich and poor under the Howard government. He says "Between 1993 and 1998 the share of the nation's wealth held by the richest 10% of

the population increased from 43% to 48%." Somewhat disingenuously, he is silent on the same trend under Labor and the Accord from 1984 to 1993. For example Hunter and Gregory use census data from 1971 to 1991 to show that the income gap between households in the wealthiest suburbs and the poorest suburbs widened by \$20,144p.a. or 92% in that period.

A policy on incomes that would meet the needs of the whole working class, and preserve the right of unions to organise and campaign would have to include:

- a minimum wage as decided by the unions,
- a living income for all not in employment, or who are underemployed,
- guaranteed wage rises to a minimum of the inflation rate,
- working hours to be reduced whilst weekly earnings are maintained until there is no unemployment
- no rules or agreements against additional claims for wages and conditions.

Such an incomes policy is more of a guide to workers campaigns than to government policy. Neither of the parties likely to win the next election is likely to adopt a policy like this.

The section on taxes seeks a more progressive system of taxes, but does not suggest the abolition of the GST. It is minimalist social-democratic tax reform.

The missing question in all of the problems that Stilwell refers to, including increased weight of managerial prerogatives and increased inequality, is "Who has the power to challenge all this, and how can that power be strengthened?". The answer to my own Dorothy Dixer is that the working class has the power. That power can be strengthened by organising supporters of class struggle, union action, and union independence from the state, and putting that ahead of the interests of alliances with anyone who is squeamish about working class action.

Which ALP Government hasn't tried to stop industrial action? A policy for working class interests cannot be formed whilst worrying whether or not it will upset Kim Beazley.

([www.nowwethepeople.org](http://www.nowwethepeople.org))

**Workers Liberty' is a group of socialists organising within the labour movement, for socialism based on the power of the self-organised working class. The struggles of workers are the bridge to the future. We argue for the new social movements to recognise that their demands cannot be won if they do not recognise the potential of the working class to replace the rule of the billionaires and their bureaucratic state machines. We take both ideas and facts seriously, we discuss and study, as well as being committed activists. Contact us if you would like to know more:**

.....

**Name:** .....

**Address:** .....

**Phone:** .....

**Email:** .....

Contact Workers' Liberty:  
P.O. Box 313 Leichhardt, 2040 NSW Australia  
e-mail: [contact@workersliberty.org](mailto:contact@workersliberty.org)

# Socialist Alliance in Britain

By Martin Thomas

The Australian Socialist Alliance held launches in April, and more are planned for May in other cities and suburbs. Members are being joined up to achieve electoral registration. Workers Liberty will be trying to encourage debate and political clarification amongst socialists inside and outside the Socialist Alliance, so that we can establish a basis for left unity in support of workers struggles, to be developed beyond the federal election. The Australian Socialist Alliance web site is at - [www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org)

The General Election is tougher terrain to hoe for the Socialist Alliance than by-elections or the Greater London Assembly election. Still, there are millions of working-class voters very aware that Tony Blair has shut down most of Labour's avenues of accountability to the labour movement. For the Socialist Alliance to get five per cent of the vote in several of its target constituencies will be difficult, but not beyond imagining.

In France in 1995, a revolutionary candidate for president, Arlette Laguiller, got 5.2% of the vote right across the country. That result - well beyond what we can reasonably hope for in Britain this year - made hundreds of thousands of workers and activists more confident. It showed them that they existed as a political force and could find a collective voice to give a warning to the politicians of the free-market consensus. It must have contributed to France's great public sector strike wave of November-December 1995 - when more workers took part in active picketing and strike-organising, and in street demonstrations, than even in the general strike of 1968 - and to the continuing relatively high level of struggle in France since then.

But confidence dribbles away again unless it is organised and focused.

In France in 1995, Arlette Laguiller's organisation, Lutte Ouvriere, followed up by calling meetings around the idea of launching a new workers' party.

Other left activists in France raised the call for revolutionary unity. If the two ideas had been combined in the right way, then maybe a new political force could have been created, a "movement for a workers' party" at least. That didn't happen; but a greater degree of activist left unity did follow, exemplified by the Euro-elections of 1999, when a joint slate of Lutte Ouvriere and the other main activist left group, the LCR, got five Euro-MPs elected.

In Britain, if the Socialist Alliance performs at all well in the General Election, we have an urgent duty to offer ongoing activity to the people mobilised and inspired around election time.

At the very least the Socialist Alliance must develop united campaigning activity on a number of fronts. It must make itself a real political factor not beside the labour movement, but within it. Links made by the Socialist Alliance now in trade union branches and with trade union activists are important for far more than the votes or the financial support they may bring. They are our lifelines to the future.

The Socialist Alliance should become a force in the labour movement which works to transform and reshape that movement so that the movement can create and sustain a workers' government. If we aim any lower, then we will deserve to be indicted as "parliamentary cretins" - people who think that putting a cross on a ballot paper is enough for a political campaign - or as half-hearted socialists who have no broader horizon than issue-by-issue actions and venture into large-scale politics only for general slogan-shouting and the occasional protest stunt.

In other words, we must aim to form a united party out of the Socialist Alliance - a "Socialist Alliance party" if you like.

Even the full forces of the Socialist Alliance could not create a fully-fledged party in the Marxist sense. Only after serious battles in the trade unions and probably a split in New Labour could an organisation emerge with sufficient weight in the labour movement that most politically-aware

workers would see it as embodying the activist initiative for working-class self-emancipation. But we could in relatively short order develop a real "movement for a workers' party".

Paradoxically, the unity of different activist left groups in the Socialist Alliance has been made easier by the low ebb of the labour movement. It is excellent that we can unite round broad-brush arguments for taxing the rich to restore public services, for ending and reversing privatisation, for trade union rights, and for civil liberties. But why do disagreements over how to make those ideas live in the labour movement - or over more "difficult" questions like Ireland or Europe - not cause more stress inside the Alliance? Partly because we all know that in the broad labour movement the arguments of the activist left still often meet indifference rather than keen

support or dispute.

As even partial electoral successes for the Socialist Alliance enliven the labour movement, they will create new opportunities and new problems for the Alliance's development. More disagreements will have to be argued out, rather than just left aside.

The biggest group in the Alliance is the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). For years, the SWP was defined politically by a "party-building" routine: flyposting, paper sales, regular setpiece mobilisations to rally the troops. Their slogans were calculated according to what would "fit the mood" and be

get involved...

## Socialist Alliance

### Local Meetings

#### SYDNEY AREA

Wednesday, May 16, 7pm  
University of Technology  
Broadway, Ultimo  
Ph Tom 0408 619 152  
or Nick 9690 1977

#### MARRICKVILLE AREA

Tuesday, May 15, 7pm  
Herb Greedy Hall, Cnr  
Petersham & Marrickville Rds  
Ph Michael 0418 450 812  
or Tom 9550 6343

#### CHATSWOOD AREA

Wednesday, May 16, 7pm  
Dougherty Community Centre  
7 Victor St, Chatswood  
Ph Zanny 0425 209 375  
or Tad 9557 8840

#### BURWOOD AREA

Tuesday, May 15, 7pm  
Burwood Community  
Welfare Services  
45 Belmore St, Burwood  
Ph Sam 9747 2722

#### PARRAMATTA

Tuesday, May 15, 7pm  
Room B, Parramatta  
Council Chambers  
Civic Place, Parramatta  
Ph 9635 9276  
or 9687 5134

All Socialist Alliance  
members and people  
interested in joining and  
campaigning with the  
Alliance are welcome.

attractive to their target audience, rather than any strategic notion. Although it has many members who individually are excellent trade unionists, the SWP as such in the unions either did no systematic work or (where they are strongest, in the NUT and UNISON) busied itself more with presenting an image of ultra-militancy than with any patient strategy. In the student movement it was similar.

The SWP has changed in recent years. Their setpiece mobilisations are more often for broad labour movement or left initiatives than just for SWP or SWP-front activities. Where previously they defined themselves as "the socialists", and refused to discuss with others, they have opened out a bit.

That is progress. However, the SWP's basic idea of what it's doing remains the same: that is, building a party machine beside the labour movement. In their view, as SWP leader Chris Bambery repeated in a recent article, the party is "forced to mirror the centralised structures of the capitalist state it is out to overthrow". In fact, the SWP is rather more centralised - with virtually no dispute allowed in its public press, and precious little inside the organisation - than the average capitalist state. The theory is that with this party as their "hard" spearhead, direct actions and demonstrations will eventually swell into revolution. What happens in the labour movement meanwhile is left vague. The SWP does not see the "revolutionary party" as we in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and round Action for Solidarity do, as the organised expression of a political struggle within the mass labour movement to transform that movement.

Consequently it tends to see the Socialist Alliance as just another setpiece exercise to rally troops. Where we say that the Alliance's strategic axis should be a fight for independent working-class political representation, they prefer just to talk about it presenting "the socialist alternative" (no bad thing - except that they also shy away from attempts to have the Socialist Alliance argue or educate about what "socialism" means. The word "socialist" here, for them, is just a good catchphrase).

They generally oppose or are reluctant about political debate in the Socialist Alliance. They do not analyse international events soberly, but use them as opportunities to find a "mood" to seize on. The "new intifada" in Palestine is not just supported (as we also side with it against Israeli government violence), but cheered on as a supposed

extension of "new anti-capitalist" militancy, without thought for the national rights of the Israeli Jews. On Ireland, the SWP alternates between gush about working-class political unity somehow growing straight out of trade-union struggles, and speculation that the Provisionals' struggle will spark "permanent revolution". During the Kosova war in 1999, they concerned themselves solely with opportunities that they saw to build a "mass movement against the war" (NATO's war), thus whitewashing Serbian imperialism.

Another important group in the Socialist Alliance is the Socialist Party. For 40 years, under their previous name, Militant, they dedicated themselves to a routine in the Labour Party of advancing resolutions for sweeping nationalisations and making speculations about how future events would surely rally the majority of the Labour Party to this patiently-expounded "Marxist programme".

Remaining from that old "Marxist programme" today is a habit of dealing with all international questions - Israel-Palestine, Ireland, many others - by declaring blandly that "socialism" or "a socialist federation" is the answer.

But their "perspective" was shattered by Labour's sharp move to the right from the late 1980s. They flipped. They left the Labour Party, declared it indistinguishable from the Tories, changed their own name, and claimed that in the "red nineties" they themselves would become a mass workers' party dominating the trade unions.

What's left now is a political routine centred around electoral work - in which they have gained some expertise and small successes - flanked by subdued, cautious, and rather bureaucratic fractions in some trade unions, notably PCS and CWU.

Because their electoral profile is so important to them - and also because they fear a repetition of the pattern in Merseyside and Scotland, where their previous strongest concentrations of membership defected from the SP to looser local alliances - the SP have taken a semi-detached stance in the Socialist Alliance. This is regrettable both because unity is better and also because it makes it harder to develop political life in the Alliance.

We will strive to develop a wing of the Socialist Alliance which stands for unity, political education and debate, and an orientation to workers' representation and the transformation of the labour movement.

## Neither Washington nor Beijing, but international socialism

*The arrogance of the US ruling class, heightened by their years as the sole world superpower since 1991, threatens to plunge the world back into a new nuclear arms race. George W Bush's "National Missile Defence" project will siphon off much-needed resources to arms-industry profiteers. Designed to demonstrate US invulnerability and overwhelming dominance to the world, it may well set going a new global arms race. To justify its military plans, Bush's administration is waving the flag and talking up enemies. It chose to "talk tough" in its confrontation with the Chinese government over its grounded spy plane. China's neo-Stalinist bureaucrats can match Washington for arrogance. When ruling-class big-power arrogance meets ruling-class big-power arrogance, millions of ordinary human lives can be put at risk. No-one should be complacent about the potential for destructive escalation in this conflict. This is not yet a full-blown New Cold War. The basic trend of US-Chinese relations since the 1970s has been towards accommodation, the re-entry of US capital into China and the re-entry of China into world trade. It is too soon to say that the spy-plane crisis marks the end of that trend, rather than an episodic conflict. But we should learn lessons from the first Cold War. Then, all too many people on the left got trapped in the narrow alternatives of "power politics". Because they were rightly opposed to US imperialism, they thought they had to support, or half-support, or "defend", or deny the existence of, the rival Russian imperialism. That was an abdication of socialist responsibility to the oppressed peoples of Eastern Europe and the USSR. We should not fall into the same trap again and think that opposing US imperialism means we have to side with Chinese imperialism. China is not only one of the most brutal regimes in the world with its treatment of its own workers the country has vast slave-labour camps, and independent trade unions are persecuted but also an imperialist power. However much we disagree with the Tibetan leaders in exile, or the government of Taiwan, the peoples of Tibet and of Taiwan have the right to self-determination.*

# Workers' Liberty

## Zapatistas march into Mexico City

By Pablo Velasco, March 2001

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) marched into Mexico City on Sunday 11th March amid a blaze of international publicity. They were greeted by a tremendous demonstration of over 150,000 people, the culmination of two weeks of high profile campaigning. The Zapatistas left their base for the capital to highlight the plight of Mexico's indigenous peoples and to press for the adoption of peace accords to end the conflict in Chiapas.

The peace agreement, known as the San Andres accords, were originally approved by the last president Zedillo in 1996 but then shelved. They involve reforms for the indigenous Indian communities, including limited regional autonomy. Last week, the Zapatistas rejected the token congressional commission offered to them, and argued instead for the right to address both houses of parliament. The Zapatista leaders have made it clear that they will not be leaving the capital until the accords are passed into law, the military bases near their strongholds dismantled and their supporters released from jail.

On 24th February, 25 Zapatista leaders headed by Subcomandante Marcos left Chiapas, accompanied by local supporters and foreign observers. They were masked, but not armed.

### Zapatour

The Zapatour, as it has been called, became an instant media attraction and was followed enthusiastically by supporters within the country and abroad. There have been huge mobilizations en route in San Cristobal de las Casas, in Oaxaca, Veracruz and Puebla, with tens of thousands of supporters turning out for large and militant rallies.

The EZLN's protest breaks a five-month silence and has proven that they retain huge public support. The march has highlighted the terrible plight of the 10 million indigenous people in Mexico. They are the poorest of the Mexico's 50 million poor, with illiteracy four times higher than the national average and infant mortality double the national average. Ninety percent of Indians live in poverty, compared to 40% of all Mexicans. The EZLN uprising in January 1994 in the resource-rich but socially impoverished region of Chiapas highlighted the plight of millions of Mexicans as the PRI-government rushed through its free market agenda.

The political context of their protest has changed irrevocably since the uprising. Last July, Vicente Fox of the conservative PAN won the presidency, taking the post away from the PRI, which had ruled Mexico for seventy years. Fox pledged to put an end to the Chiapas conflict "in 15 minutes" during his campaign and has publicly welcoming the Zapatista march, claiming to be "putting my presidency at stake, all my political capital". With 75% of Mexicans supporting the Zapatistas, he can ill-afford to ignore its

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significance. However others in the country, including business leaders and the military favour a more repressive approach. The PAN governor of Queretaro province for example has labeled the rebels "traitors" and called for them to be sentenced to death. Since 1994 there has been a cycle of talks followed by a clampdown; it is probable that this pattern will continue unless the accords are passed.

The Zapatistas themselves are sceptical of the new president, given Fox's neo-liberal economic agenda, decrying what they term "the peace of lies". As Marcos put it: "There is currently a fierce battle and dispute underway over the dove of peace. The Fox government wants to make it into an advertising logo. You can choose the type of peace that there should be in the country. This is the alternative, a dove for public relations purposes or a dove that flies and leaves no one beneath anyone else."

The significance of the march and of the Zapatista movement cannot be underestimated. They have blazed a trail for the international anti-capitalist mobilisations that have gripped the imagination of many young activists, and played their part in ending the world longest running one-party state. Some have hailed them as the first post-modern political movement; others see them as central to the revival of a new international left. Naomi Klein has written a series of eulogies in *The Guardian* championing their new politics.

### Zapatista party?

These assessments are somewhat overdone. Five years ago the prospects of a new Zapatista political party looked bright but have withered ever since. Similarly, attempts to link up with labour, community and social movement, after some initial promise, have not developed into a lasting organisation. The march may well revive attempts to pull together a political formation, particularly given the disarray of the PRD and the new political space opened up by the defeat of the PRI. However the main weakness of the Zapatistas is their inability to link up with the growing wave of independent unionism in Mexico and to articulate a programme for the Mexican working class, the largest class in the country. Despite the new conservative government and the beginning as of recession, there is now the greatest opportunity for half a century for Mexican workers to build an independent labour movement. The Zapatistas and their supporters in the mainly rural indigenous communities, together with the millions of urban poor, are essential allies of this burgeoning workers' movement. It was a tragedy during the Mexican revolution (1910-20) that their historical progenitor Emiliano Zapata fought in isolation from the embryonic labour movement and was defeated; a repetition of this calamity must be avoided at all costs.