

Workers' Liberty



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

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For international working class solidarity against war and terrorism

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Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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Bali bomb – Unleashing more repression?

We condemn the bombing in Bali, and offer our deepest sympathies to the victims from all countries.

Discovering the truth

We have no trust in the Indonesian police and military (the butchers of East Timor, Aceh, West Papua) to conduct an inquiry that will discover the truth. We have no trust in The USA (most recently the butchers of Afghanistan and Iraq), or the Howard government (the USA's unconditional ally) to uncover the truth.

The results of investigations so far as reported in the media are contradictory. Cases are being made that the perpetrators are Islamic fundamentalists, possibly associated with Al Qaeda or with Jemmah Islamiah.

But there is a long history in Indonesia of collaboration with such reactionary Islamists by sections of the ruling elite and the army in pursuit of their interests. The bombs could be aimed at weakening the Megawati government. There is speculation that elements of the TNI (the Indonesian military) could have played a role in the bombing. Others allege that it could be a US plot to keep the threat of "terrorism" alive.

None of these explanations is beyond belief, which means that any of the police and military forces which are being authorised to investigate the bombing, conceivably could have reasons for covering up.

The Indonesian authorities may well frame a guilty party in order to appear to be addressing the problem.

With guardians like these

We have no confidence in the US led "war on terror" to keep us safe from such attacks. In 13 months since September 11 they have failed to capture Osama bin Laden. They have murdered Afghan civilians by the thousands, and they have spent the last several months preparing war on Iraq and Saddam Hussein who has not been connected with either attack. Meanwhile the governments of several countries where evidence has strongly suggested that Islamist terrorists operate (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia) have not taken any action, but the USA approves of these governments and has done nothing.

The Howard Governments' priorities were revealed with its failure to publish a warning from the US State Department that tourist destinations in Indonesia were serious targets. A serious warning from US intelligence that energy supply infrastructure in Indonesia was a likely target was published and acted upon. Australian capital invested in Indonesia had to be protected. But diplomatic relations with Indonesia seem to have been considered

more important than issuing a warning that might have led some Australian tourists to stay away from Bali.

Freedoms

The reaction to this bombing by the governments in Indonesia, Australia and other countries is likely to be to increase police and army powers and to further curtail civil liberties and freedoms. We know that Bush, Howard and their cronies will try to use this horror for their political ends.

First up in Australia will be a renewed push to pass the laws to extend ASIO's powers to clamp down on civil liberties. The ALP and other parties have opposed the ASIO laws so far - we call on them to refuse to buckle under to Howard on the back of these events. Bush and Howard will try to use this tragedy to argue for a renewed clamp on civil liberties and for "strong states" throughout Asia - for Malaysia's Internal Security Act, for Indonesia to crack down on dissent of all types. Within 10 days of the Bali bombing Megawati had introduced decrees that increased police powers to arrest and detain without trial. In Indonesia this is particularly dangerous for the fledgling trade union and democratic movements, against whom the state will not hesitate to use the laws when they judge the time is right.

The political dangers in Indonesia are grave - there could be a return to naked military dictatorship, unelected presidency, intensified repression of national independence struggles, an Islamist resurgence and the repression of women which it typically carries out, a split in the military along sectarian lines.

Our response to this bombing is:

For Australian unions to express their solidarity with Indonesian unions and workers for:

- a joint Indonesian – Australian union led inquiry into the bombing
 - defence against threats to workers and democratic rights, from state repression in Indonesia, Australia and the countries of the region, and from reactionary Islamic fundamentalism particularly in Indonesia.
 - open discussion on public safety within the context of maintaining civil liberties, in Indonesia and Australia, in the wake of the bombing.
 - all information gathered by any official Australian, Indonesian or other inquiries to be made public.
 - quality medical treatment for all the victims of the bombing, whether Balinese, Australian or any other nationality.
 - no war against Iraq, it is a fake "war on terror".
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Bali aftermath analysis

Asia-Pacific Solidarity

Janet Burstall

Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific (ASAP) is a campaign that is led by members and supporters of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP). ASAP's statement on the Bali bombings (below - The world they have created) condemns the bombing and then puts forward two basic ideas. One, that the Bali bombing is understandable as a product of the history of military power and brutality in Indonesia, backed by the Australian government.

Two, that the main response to the bombings must be to call on the Australian Government to act by: acknowledging these problems: pursuing the culprits: lobbying for an international war crimes tribunal; lobbying for an end to violence in Aceh and West Papua and for a political solution that includes a referendum; ending its support for the IMF-backed Western pillage of Indonesia that is causing suffering and poverty.

This is meant to be statement for solidarity - presumably solidarity between the workers of Indonesia and Australia.

Firstly, IF the bombing is the work of Islamic fundamentalists, the history of military power and state repression in Indonesia is only one element in an explanation of the bombing. It implies that there is an inevitability to fundamentalism and indiscriminate violence in Indonesia. That implication cannot be accepted by the independent workers' movement in Indonesia, whose bloody enemy the fundamentalists are. The independent workers movement in Indonesia has other methods for fighting the social and economic evils that capitalism is wreaking on Indonesia, and that does not involve indiscriminate killings.

Secondly the ASAP statement is directed at the Australian Government, seeking government diplomacy and foreign policy as the answer to preventing more such bombings. Australian government diplomacy is NOT an avenue for the expression of class solidarity. As a socialist organisation, Workers Liberty offers its policies and proposals to workers to take up. In this case we offer proposals that can be taken up by workers in both Indonesia and Australia.

The ASAP's pointing of the finger at "IMF-backed Western pillage of Indonesia" reflects Third World nationalism, rather than a socialist response which identifies the pillage as "capitalist" rather than "Western". The genuflection to this anti-Western sentiment is at best a sort of naïve Freudian slip in the context of the anti-Western anger that is often expressed by fundamentalists.

The world they have created

ASAP statement on the Bali bombings
October 15, 2002

Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific condemns outright the barbaric bombing that took place in Bali on October 13 and that took the lives of at least 200 people from Bali, Indonesia, Australia and around the world. This was an act of mass murder carried out against defenceless people. ASAP extends its sympathy and solidarity to the families of all those killed and injured.

ASAP is also concerned that such events do not happen again. However, ending this kind of violence is not essentially a security problem but a social and political problem. The solution lies not in cultivating a climate of fear to justify increased state repression, but in addressing the root causes. The use of violence in politics has been employed on a massive scale by the ruling governments and elites of the world.

For decades the Suharto New Order regime used terror to control Indonesia and East Timor. During those decades Australian governments, both Labor and Liberal, gave full support to this terrorist regime. Suharto used the Indonesian armed forces and police, as well as paramilitary groups, to conduct secret operations of murder and terror against the pro-democracy and independence movements.

Terror, carried out by both the state and groups originally created by the state, became an everyday part of Indonesian political life under the Western-backed Suharto regime. In the midst of Suharto's use of terror for repression, PM John Howard once called Suharto a "caring and sensitive" leader.

Now Australians and other foreigners have fallen victim to the same violence that have taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians, including Balinese, during the Suharto period.

Such violence is bound to increase in this region while state violence continues to be used as a means of asserting and defending the privileges and interests of Western and local elites. Murder and torture continue in Aceh, Papua and West Papua with Western, including Australian acquiescence. Violence is used to suppress peaceful protests by workers, peasants and students throughout the rest of Indonesia, again with Australia's acquiescence. Many activists remain in jail in Indonesia as a result of state repression. Meanwhile, the Australian government suggests escalating military ties with Jakarta's repressive apparatus.

While such state terror and Western support for state terror against the Indonesian, Acehnese and Papuan people continues with impunity, every and any kind of violent act may be contemplated by every and any kind of group or individual. Society is in the process of disintegrating in Indonesia as a result of the economic crisis that began in 1997, now made worse by

the accelerated plunder of the Indonesian society and economy under the supervision of the IMF. As poverty, suffering and uncertainty increase, then so will desperation, frustration and irrationality, as well as scheming and plotting among the elite.

This is the society that Suharto's New Order created and which was defended, justified and assisted by Australian governments, including and especially that led by the hypocrite, John Howard.

The violence will end only when this situation is reversed. Yes, of course, the perpetrators of this criminal act should be identified and brought to justice. But the underlying causes should also be addressed. The Australian government should assist in this by implementing the following:

- Acknowledging the underlying causes of the spread of violence in politics, including its own culpability;
- Genuinely pursuing the perpetrators of the act of terror in Bali, relying on real facts and evidence and not religious profiling;
- Ceasing its cynical manipulation of the natural sympathy for the victims to strengthen its own repressive legislation and security apparatus, which also justifies similar actions by the corrupt ruling elite in Indonesia;
- actively lobbying for an end to violence in Aceh and West Papua and for a political solution that includes a referendum;
- actively lobbying for an international war crimes tribunal to bring those responsible for the carnage in East Timor from 1975-1999 to justice; and
- ending its support for the IMF-backed Western pillage of Indonesia that is causing suffering and poverty.

When the state has the job of uncovering the truth about murders

By Lynn Smith

Attempts by Indonesian police to act independently are met with force by the military: In September when an Indonesian cop tried to arrest a soldier for possession of drugs the soldier's mates opened fire killing some 5-10 police and burning their HQ to the ground. The soldiers who started the fight were merely suspended.

When five Australian reporters were murdered as the Indonesian army invaded East Timor in 1975. The "investigation" was left to the Indonesian police who sat on their hands since it was the army that did it. After 25 years the full facts have yet to come out. Because successive Australian Liberal and Labor Australian governments wanted to keep things nice and cosy with the Soeharto dictatorship the two inquiries held in this country were smokescreens producing no new information (i.e. names were not named). To date I don't believe anyone in the Indonesian military has been charged for these killings.

Indonesian unionists take stand against the Bali bombing.

The FNPBI (National Front for Indonesian Workers' Struggle) like Workers Liberty clearly condemns the bombing, states that the main danger arising is the threat to democratic rights and that the Indonesian state cannot be trusted to conduct an honest inquiry into the bombings. The FNPBI calls for an inquiry that "involves various national and international democratic forces". It is not clear who would qualify as democratic forces by the FNPBI's criteria, but clearly this would include trade unions and so shares a common concern with Workers' Liberty for an inquiry that can be trusted, that will not be controlled by the vested interests of the Indonesian (or Australian) state. The support of the FNPBI for a "democratic forces" inquiry provides a basis for approaching Australian unions to take this up.

Statement by the FNPBI

**CONDEMN THE BALI BOMBING
RESIST THE NEW DICTATORSHIP**

Six days after the bomb explosion in Legian, Kuta Bali, the Indonesian Government issued Government Decree (GD) 1/2002 and GD 2/2002 on the Elimination of Terrorism. After Bali's tragedy, the Megawati-Hamzah Haz government has found a justification for a more repressive policy.

This government has the blessing of, and complete support from, the governments of Bush, Howard and Blair to - on behalf of humanity and stability - carry on its anti-democratic policies.

We, the working people, condemn this tragedy on the Island of Paradise, which has killed 187 people, and injured more than 300 others. We condemn every single cowardly political action which sacrifices other people's lives in order to get a better bargaining position. We express our sorrow, deeply and from our hearts, for the families of the victims - both those who have been killed, and others who are still in hospital.

However, we reject the efforts being made to create from this tragedy grounds for developing an anti-terrorist hysteria among the people. Bush, Blair and Howard are the pioneers of such an anti-terrorist campaign. They are an alliance of warmongers. We believe this tragedy has to be placed proportionately, as one part of the whole crisis of democracy and the crisis in the capitalist economic system that we are going through, in Indonesia as well as in other parts of the world. The main problem faced by this nation is the consolidation of New Order's Dictatorship, and the neo-liberal economic policy implemented by Mega-Hamzah Government which has spread poverty all over the country.

GD 1/2002 is the beginning of the decline of the democratic revolution which we have defended so hard since the fall of Suharto. This decree gives a very strong authority for the intelligence apparatus to conduct any arrests, interrogations and investigations they see fit to

carry out, and without first having to collect proper evidence. This decree opens up an opportunity for the military to, once again, move into the political arena. This decree not only allows the targeting of the groups of political Islam - they are only the first on the list. Pro-democratic movements, left groups, workers' and peasants' unions, student movements, etc, would become the next targets.

The whole campaign, and actions of Bush-Blair-Howard, and now Megawati, are basically an effort to smash various people's actions and struggles. Neo-liberal policies have created poverty, hunger, violence and bloodshed everywhere. War is the only way possible to get out of crisis, as well as an opportunity to crush the people's anger caused by crisis. In the middle of industrial collapses, war would stimulate the armaments industries, which in turn create multiple profits for the arms business. This dying capitalism needs fresh blood from the profits of arms sales.

We support every effort to destroy terrorism, but completely resist the idea of the possible emergence of a new kind of dictatorship, both at national and international levels.

Therefore FNPBI demands

1. The creation of a joint investigation team, which involves various national and international democratic forces, to conduct an investigation on Kuta tragedy. We believe that this government is not in a position to be the only "in-charge" element, since the government is itself part of the problem.
2. Joint actions to actively reject the decree, which would deliver democracy to the graveyard, and send activists behind bars.
3. The building of an international movement against war and against globalisation, as evidence of global workers' solidarity.
4. Call on the democratic forces to place the issue of terrorism proportionately, in order not to fade out of the picture the other economic and political problems - such as debt, corruption, human rights violations, privatisations, etc.
5. The creation of an alternative government consisting of democratic forces all over Indonesia, that would be able to carry out an anti-neo-liberal programme, and the elimination of New Order forces.

Jakarta, October 24, 2002
National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPBI)

Dita Sari, Chairperson
Ilhamsyah, Secretary General

Socialist Alliance

Left unity means uniting the socialist left with the working class.

Janet Burstall

Socialist Alliance (SA) members are discussing left unity with renewed fervour in response to the Democratic Socialist Party's (DSP) recently announced intention to vote at its January 2003 conference to publish Green Left Weekly and to meet as the Democratic Socialist Tendency within the Socialist Alliance, and not as the DSP. Janet Burstall comments on the significance of the discussion and reactions.

The central issue of any unity in politics is what is the agreement, what is the common understanding and basis for action?

The DSP on the one hand is hoping to lead by organisational example, to create a bigger weight of numbers available to be organised into and be organisers of the SA. The politics as far as the DSP is concerned, have evolved since the founding conference in August 2003 as a consensus from the deliberations of the various committee level bodies of the SA, without a democratic process involving the membership. Dick Nicholls, the DSP's representative as one of three national co-convenors of the SA flagged the DSP's intention to propose a vision statement about socialism soon. But the DSP has so far put the organisational cart before the political horse.

On the other hand, the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) has reacted as if the DSP's actions alone are designed to and indeed could turn the SA into the creature of the DSP, and is acting like a shying horse that is frightened of the cart altogether. The ISO is arguing to keep it simple - keep the Socialist Alliance as an "electoral united front", as one of many arenas for left unity, others being the anti-capitalist movement, anti-war movement, refugee solidarity. The ISO thinks that the SA cannot be the forum for regroupment of the revolutionary left, without driving away all the independents who are turning from Labor and looking for a broad alternative.

It is a new and welcome move to find the ISO addressing electoral politics with something more positive than "kick the Liberals out". But the ISO's history does not equip it well to integrate struggle on the three fronts - economic, political and ideological. So the ISO's participation in the SA project is fuelling confusion and divisions within the ISO and loss of members to its co-thinking Socialist Alternative, which has judged a different mood amongst the masses, and therefore is not affiliated to the SA.

So the DSP is pressing the organisational accelerator, and the ISO says that the way to unity is through joint work on a variety of fronts, the SA being only one of them, and an electoral one.

History of division

Workers' Liberty is for accelerating progress towards left unity. Our position on this is based on our understanding of the origins and significance of divisions on the revolutionary left.

We come from the 20th century history of defeats for the organised working class in Russia, Europe and China, and of the decline of the left, of disappointed expectations in both social democracy and Stalinism. Correspondingly, the collapse of Stalinist power has cleared the decks and created the opportunity that the Socialist Alliance is seizing.

Each strand of post WWII Trotskyism has developed its own world view in response to the contradiction of Stalinism. The conundrum that the post WWII Trotskyists have grappled with was how could Stalin, who imprisoned and murdered the revolutionary workers of Russia, be understood to preside over and create workers states? Answers to this were developed by the Trotskyists pretty much in isolation not only from the class struggle but also in a series of splits.

Socialists are coming from decades during which we have each developed our own set of explanations for the defeats of the 20th century, as the revolutionary Marxists were variously murdered, isolated, or retreated. We each developed our own jargon, our own set of references. As far as Workers' Liberty is concerned, there has been demonstrable repeated avoidance of reassessment of yesterday's politics against today's developments. The various revolutionary left groups have not been forced to test assertions against the experience of a working class movement, because we have generally had a low level of influence in the labour movement.

Socialists face twin challenges as a result of this history. The organised working class movement is bureaucratized and dominated by and large by a conservative leadership. Socialists and Marxists have very little influence within the working class, on the course of working class self-organisation and struggle.

The SA framework

This means that WL does not see the counterposition that the ISO does, between the Socialist Alliance being either a broad electoral front, or a revolutionary regroupment project. Rather the SA is a chance for the left to come up with an immediate platform and program for working class politics, to develop in dialogue with working class activists an understanding of the needs of specific working class struggles. This is the political basis for the SA to mobilise the broadest range of socialists. As a result and in that context, we will be forced to resolve some of the issues which have divided the revolutionary left.

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The fact is that there are important political differences within the Alliance. But what is a remarkable achievement is that groups which for years had barely had discussion, whose members rarely read one another's press, whose meetings were sometimes chaired in a way hostile to any challenge to the line of their organisation, are now working together within a democratic structure, discussing political issues in a comradely fashion. If any unity worth the name must be based on agreement, and differences are resolved by dialogue accompanied by common practice and experiences - then the SA has already laid a precious foundation.

Workers Liberty proposes that there are certain steps to be taken towards developing more meaningful left unity. If we don't move towards greater left unity, then we are doing a disservice to the working class movement, which will remain trapped in some form of reformist politics, if there is no clear and predominant socialist alternative offered and fought for.

The way forward

The most important immediate goals that we could set to resolving differences would be:

1. A more encompassing platform, a document that is on the way to becoming a program, at least of current action and policies. It should be fit to present to the Australian working class as a whole and represent the political aspirations of the most advanced workers, and give them something clear to fight for in their unions and communities. It must connect class struggle and solidarity, and a critique of capital to all the issues it takes up, to move beyond the limits of protest politics. It must be more than dot points, it must answer questions, such as "where is the money coming from?", "why not vote Green, they have more chance of getting elected, and we know what we're getting with them?", "you just care about refugees, Iraqis and drug users, but what about Australians?".

The ISO's preference for "an electoral united front" is unfathomable as a socialist perspective. It was based on an expectation that by simply raising a socialist banner in an election and speaking the language of 'true reformism', we could rally an enormous base of support. Experience has proved this expectation to be ill-founded. A perceived "mass mood" is not a reliable basis for planning socialist politics. So where can the "electoral united front" take us? What can it achieve? Only more of the same, no breakthrough. Those sights are too low for what is needed.

But the "unity in practice" which the DSP refers to is not the kind of political agreement we need. Various delegated committees, from National Convenors to state groups, have managed to issue various statements on current political issues, and lots of common protest actions have been built, especially around the war and refugees.

But still the DSP and the ISO are working in separate campaigns on refugees, the war and on campus. The

DSP's justification of multiple campaigns as representing healthy pluralism has no credibility. The political basis for division should be being discussed with the aim of resolution.

But even a resolution of these campaigning matters will not be sufficient. The "unity in practice" within the SA is still too limited. The discussion on any statements has been mainly at committee, not membership and branch levels. And it is basically at the lowest common denominator level needed to co-ordinate protests that reflect basic democratic concerns and do not make consistent connections between the issues, working class solidarity and socialism.

Our platform does not explain what is different about our approach from the Greens. We say that they rely on parliament and we don't. We organise more demonstrations. But why bother to vote in a parliamentary election for demonstrations, when you can show support for demonstrations by ... demonstrating. We should be standing in elections to advocate an alternative to reliance on parliamentary elections.

In our priority pledges and our printed material we should be asking people to vote for us because in this capitalist society, all the other parties will leave the power of capital unchallenged, except for us. We should say that we stand with workers, we are a voice for working class interests against capital. We should say that we are a voice for Australian workers and workers of all countries. We should more clearly say it is in the interests of Australian workers to make solidarity with refugees and the people of Iraq.

We should say that will be a voice for working class interests in parliament and we will speak for a government of, for and by the working class. We should say that we are for socialism that is made by the solidarity of working class people, in our workplaces, in our communities, against capital, and for a democratically self-managed publicly owned economy.

2. A publication, at least monthly, with a broadly representative editorial board, to give expression to the practical application of the new platform.

Without constant application of our agreement, we cannot communicate it, test it in practice or develop it.

3. A commitment to further discussion of differences. Neither a regular publication nor a more developed platform can answer in one voice all the questions or disagreements of our history or our future. We must maintain and extend the constitutional provisions of the SA for the right to caucus around politics, and to guarantee public debate, including in the pages of our publication. Only in this way could our publication also reflect the contentious issues awaiting resolution in the labour movement also.

The longer term need for a more encompassing platform document can only be achieved through more discussion, and thorough identification of the political basis of any disagreements. From here we can plan to work through our disagreements, taking the necessary

time for reading, debating and still maintaining our activism.

The issues which we will have to discuss if we are to have a clear and conscious basis for unity and free expression of disagreement within that unity include:

- imperialism and national rights, eg the rights of Palestinians and Israeli Jews,
- working class versus 'radical' politics, including anti-imperialism, and the dangers of reactionary anti-imperialists (eg Islamists) to the working class and democratic rights. We see the question of class and party as utterly interdependent. Any radical social forces must orient towards the working class, to become part of the socialist project, to achieve anything more than a victory that can be accommodated by capitalism.
- the nature of Stalinism, state ownership and socialism,
- the relationship between Marxists, working class movements and reformist or reactionary leaderships
- the relationship between class struggle and that of all the oppressed
- the relationship between industrial, political and ideological struggle, and the revolutionary use of parliamentary politics to fight for a workers' government.

4. Day to day activism via the Socialist Alliance.

Sue Johnson at Marxism 2002 accurately identified that a major problem for the SA is lack of grass-roots campaigning. If we were to conduct our day to day activism through the SA, we would increase the capacity of the SA to contribute to such grass roots campaign.

It will relieve pressure on SA members to duplicate their activities, provide more energy for the SA, increase our ability to contribute to trade union and community campaigns, bring more comrades into closer contact, and encourage a more thorough-going political discussion at the membership level, raising our level of political education and breaking down the old barriers between left groups.

A common organisation, the Socialist Alliance, with a consciously agreed and enthusiastically adopted platform, a lively publication which reflects all points of view, and action together on that basis is a much better framework for continuing to work through our differences than we have now.

Cunningham By election

By Riki Lane

Cunningham represents a huge kick in the teeth for the Australian Labor Party leadership. It graphically demonstrates the big shifts in how workers relate to political parties. It's significance is not just that the ALP lost a safe seat - the first federal by-election loss by an opposition party since 1943. It is also how they lost which is important.

Ten per cent voted for Peter Wilson, a candidate supported by the South Coast Labour Council, running on a fairly wishy-washy program. He ran after ALP Head Office, Sussex Street, imposed a right wing candidate on the local left wing branches. This came on top of branch stacking by the right.

On polling day, many local ALP members were handing out 'How to vote' leaflets for Wilson and arguing against the ALP campaigners who were bussed in from elsewhere to support the official candidate.

What Wilson's campaign represented was in one sense just the usual manoeuvring between the left and right ALP factions. Wilson represented only a partial organisational break, still completely on the political terrain of Laborism. A previous example was when the ALP Left gave under the table support to independent Phil Cleary when he first ran and won the federal seat of Wills in Melbourne after Bob Hawke retired.

However, by making the organisational break, by preferencing the Greens so that they won, it has made a difference to the whole political landscape. The Greens are on a roll, now seen as a realistic alternative in conventional opportunist electoral terms. Their chances of winning ALP inner city seats in the Victorian and NSW state elections now look much improved.

The Greens are making a pitch for unionist's votes. They leafleted the rally in defence of CFMEU leader, Martin Kingham, pledging if elected to obstruct implementation of anti-union laws and support union preference in state contracts. [Martin Kingham is the CFMEU Victorian leader being brought before the courts for not handing over union membership lists to the Cole Construction Industry Royal Commission.]

Alliance response

The Socialist Alliance needs to argue that we are the only consistent working class alternative, but also keep pressure on the Greens from their left. It is good for working class politics if the Greens take a higher profile on class issues. It helps to build up the tensions between their very good left policies, their opportunist leaders, and the middle class section of their support base.

SA received a small vote, 0.6%, in Cunningham. This was to be expected once Wilson entered the election. We did have some political impact by keeping the Greens and

Wilson to an unequivocal anti-war position. The SA made some mistakes in the Cunningham campaign, particularly with our preference policy. The local branch decided to put the Greens before Wilson, then the Democrats, and then the ALP.

This was essentially based on the various candidates' attitudes to the war drive. The approach taken to preferences flows from a class free analysis of the various parties. The DSP, in particular, see the ALP as just another capitalist party and thus see no problem in putting the Democrats before the ALP. In the same way, for the DSP, Wilson's union base was less important than his policy inadequacies compared to the Greens.

If you took the argument to its logical conclusion, we should have preferenced the quasi-fascist CEC before the ALP. They take a stand against the war drive, for refugees, against the anti-terror laws. They recently got many prominent unionists to sign statements published in newspaper advertisements. Obviously, that they are a poisonous anti-worker and reactionary organisation precludes any support.

Why then, would SA not consider as important the relationship to the working class of the ALP and Wilson's campaign?

Workers' Liberty argues that SA needs to base its approach quite differently. We have to make a working class orientation central. The whole experience of Wilson's campaign demonstrates, in a strange way, the continuing connection of the ALP to the unions. The revolt by ALP members and unionists was about the ALP leaders betraying workers' interests and treating them as pawns.

SA needs to relate effectively to the growing discontent with the ALP by workers. A perspective for a mass class struggle workers party means that a break like Wilson's is crucial. Connecting with those backing his campaign should have been at the centre of our politics. While opposing the war drive was a vitally important issue, SA missed an opportunity to put class struggle politics centre stage.

This is particularly a problem on the NSW South Coast, with its long history of militant union organisation centered on the 'steel town' of Wollongong. If we are really to lay down roots in the organised working class, we cannot keep orienting mainly to activists in the movements and campaigns.

To summarise: Socialist Alliance needs to be focussed on a perspective of helping to create a mass class struggle workers party; connecting with unionised workers is central. Our attitude to preferences needs a class analysis at its base, not just radical social movement politics.

Letter to Socialist Worker

While Workers' Liberty welcomes the DSP's intentions to put far more of its resources into the Alliance, we believe that there are other measures that the Alliance itself needs to take, to become a working class socialist alternative.

We have from the start been critical of the ISO's insistence that the SA can only attract angry Labor voters with the best points of an old Labor reformist platform. We disagree that the SA must be limited to being an explicitly non-revolutionary electoral united front. But it is false to pose the issue as "reform vs revolution".

The Cunningham by-election result confirms our argument that the current dot point platform of the SA is not a reason to vote SA rather than Green. The SA needs to make being on the side of the working class the explicitly defining basis of our politics. The SA has put more effort into refugee and anti-war solidarity, than on solutions to the problems of working class people in Australia. For example the Tampa crisis and the Ansett collapse were almost simultaneous - but what did the SA campaign on? The SA's advocacy of refugee rights, and against the war should be explained in terms of working class solidarity.

Workers' Liberty advocate that the priority pledge, the core of what the SA advocates, should be 'for a workers' government' and for a working class plan to rebuild jobs, services and environmental sustainability on the basis of public ownership and democratic control by workers and the community.

The working class should be the centre of our platform on all 3 fronts - economic (support trade union and workplace struggles), political (for a government in the interests of and accountable to the working class) and ideological (expose the role of capital and the class relations behind the issues). Then the question of reform vs revolution is really beside the point. It will only come to life when the working class in struggle confronts it directly.

I agree that the SA needs to do a lot more on the ground campaigning. The DSP's proposal seems to improve the possibilities for this. It will still need more agreement and resolution of differences to develop. For our part, Workers' Liberty has proposed a SA policy for trade union work. These specific issues too belong on the agenda of SA branches and conferences, in the SA Discussion bulletins and in a more regular publication of the SA.

It will primarily be the content of the SA's own basis of agreement, the enthusiasm and commitment with which we campaign on all fronts, and the democratic, participatory and educational nature of the SA's own debates and discussions that will make non-aligned socialists, anti-capitalist and working class activists turn to the SA as their own alternative to both Labor and the Greens.

The ISO has many more members and much more capacity than Workers' Liberty to advocate such positive proposals to take the SA forward. This would be of much

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greater significance than whether or not the DSP becomes the DST inside the SA. It is up to the Little Red Socialist Alliance not to become a meal for the Green Left Wolf. Janet Burstall, Workers' Liberty

Left Unity meeting

Leon Parissi

On 24 October the Socialist Alliance sponsored a public meeting in Sydney to discuss the prospects for "Left Unity" in the wake of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) proposal to transform itself into a tendency within the Socialist Alliance. Over 70 people came along to hear speakers from the DSP, International Socialist Organisation (ISO), Workers' Liberty and the Workers' League. A lively discussion followed the introductory remarks.

Speakers from the DSP argued that the main significance of the DSP proposal will be increased involvement by DSP members and their resources in building the SA. They explained that other affiliates need not follow suit and also dissolve into the Alliance as a tendency. They went further and explained that the SA platform, constitution and political practice would essentially remain the same subject to ongoing discussions.

Speakers for the ISO on the other hand explained their strong reservations about the impact of the Democratic Socialist proposal. They repeated the ISO view that the SA should be seen only as an 'electoral united front'. For them left regroupment is not on the agenda in the near future.

This discussion didn't result in much further clarification and one suspects didn't change anybody's mind. The DSP comrades followed their common practice of providing about twice as many speakers as was necessary. Thus they didn't do much to allay fears in some of 'swamping' proceedings in a 'new look' Socialist Alliance. It may be that nobody left the meeting with a different opinion from that which they brought to it. However on a positive note there was a resolution to reconvene another open discussion of the issues before the end of the year.

Janet Burstall, speaking for Workers' Liberty supported the idea of moving forward with the project of left unity but pointed out that to succeed it must be on the basis of increasing political clarity and not just through an administrative act. The Alliance should be working towards developing a platform which projects the need for a workers' government and not merely reflect a platform of demands for the next worthy demonstration. She asked the DSP to point out what political advance was being proposed for the SA beyond the organisational proposals already on the table. For the ISO the question is "what way forward do they propose for the Alliance?"

All proposals for advancing political discussion could be considered within a more united organisation without the seeming necessity of a split each time a difficulty was encountered. To move beyond the unfortunate and long history of 'splitism' on the revolutionary left would be a major advance. To this end a clear understanding of democracy is essential.

Socialism From Below

A discussion series sponsored by
Workers' Liberty

We will be examining the Hal Draper's pamphlet "The Two Souls of Socialism" and extracts from his 4 Volume work "Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution"

What the Marxists Internet Archive has to say about Hal Draper:

*"From 1932 until his death in 1990, Hal Draper was a prolific Marxist writer and a socialist activist. In the 50s, a time of general collapse and demoralization in the American left, Draper edited the weekly **Labor Action**, a political journal widely read in Europe as well as the United States because of its uncompromising rejection of the American consensus which did not depend on accepting that other form of despair – the slavish defense of "real existing socialism" as the only alternative. It was not possible, of course, to remain in opposition to the "real existing crap" of both sides of the Cold War without rethinking the history of the movement. Draper's 4-volume **Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution** is his principal achievement in this regard."* (<http://www.marxists.org/>)



First two meetings in the new series of discussions:

4 November . "The Two Souls of Socialism"

9 December: "Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution" Pt 1

6:00 pm

The Café Blue 313 King Street Newtown (2 mins, opp Newtown Station) Upstairs

Contact WL for copies of readings: 0419 493421

Email: contact@workersliberty.org

Web: <http://australia.workersliberty.org/>

The Blackshirts and community resistance

By Meryan Tozer

The Blackshirts are a Melbourne-based men's group united around a concern to restore and promote the 'traditional family'. Particularly outspoken about the 'threats' to conventional father-headed households of homosexuality, divorce and adultery, they seek to impose their beliefs by harassing single and lesbian mothers, their children and new partners. Distributing abusive 'open letters' in women's neighbourhoods, staging protests and howling through megaphones outside their targets homes, stalking women, making phantom phone calls and disrupting Family Court proceedings are among the tactics employed by the group.

The Blackshirts' particular brand of ideology mixes the worst of the Howard Government's 1950s style family values with the dangerous reactionary moralism of vigilante fascists on a 'divine mission'. Blackshirts leader, John *Workers' Liberty* No. 25 August 2002

Abbott, could be described as a Christian Fundamentalist, based on his literal interpretation of biblical passages, his promotion of an archaic moral code for women and his prioritisation of religious over secular law on certain issues such as marriage, divorce and adultery.

His website espouses rhetoric about the religious sanctity of marriage, which is defined as a life-long union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, of which dissolution by constitutional law should not be recognised. It states "If marriage is solemnised on the grounds of religious exercise and upon the added condition that 'what God has joined together let no man put asunder', then such condition forms part of the, so to say, marriage contract then such contract must be observed." (<http://www.blackshirts.info/>)

At the top of the Blackshirts' list of sins is adultery, which they regards as "much more damaging to children's lives than paedophilia itself." (<http://www.blackshirts.info/>)

At the same time, the Blackshirts' name, black paramilitary uniform, insignia and beliefs have purposeful reference to Mussolini's Italian fascists (known colloquially as the Blackshirts) and to the militant anti-Semitic, anti-Irish and anti-unionist Blackshirt thugs headed by Sir Oswald Mosely in Britain in the 1930s.

Abbott has publicly allied himself with Fascism, stating in a television interview, "It comes from the Roman word 'fascio' which is a symbol of unity to the people as a republic. I don't have any problems with Fascism... or with the terminology."

A force to be reckoned with...

The Blackshirts' politics have been downplayed by some as the fringe extremism of an embittered and isolated group of men who will never gain broad-based support. The threat posed by the Blackshirts, however, is not to be underestimated. They have violently terrorised a small group of people, and disseminated their misogynistic and homophobic views through the media to a much larger group.

At an anti-Blackshirts community meeting in September, which attracted over 200 concerned citizens, Paula Pope, shared some insights into life as a Blackshirts victim. Since being threatened with a visit from the Blackshirts, she has made contact with a number of families whose lives have drastically changed since being targeted by the Blackshirts: "They talk of how they have no idea anymore of how to live an ordinary, peaceful life. Life is running, life is hiding, life is fighting as best you can and constantly looking for a place to run to", Paula said.

Karen Milgrom from the Coburg Brunswick Community Legal Centre reminded the meeting that the terror experienced by Blackshirts' targets is a reality for many more women who experience violence in their homes on a daily basis. She said that in Victoria last year, police were called out to 22,000 domestic violence cases and, according to Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, only 20% of cases get reported.

In a the context of a society plagued by domestic violence, the Blackshirts beliefs - particularly their opposition to no-fault divorce - and the media attention they are attracting, need to be treated as a serious threat.

Brunswick local Independent Phil Cleary fears that the Blackshirts are creating "an incubator in which hate crimes against women will fester." Indeed, Abbott is apologetic for violent reactions by men who are experiencing divorce. He was quoted in the Moreland Community News (27/8/02) as saying, "One case that comes to mind is the man [who] knifed his wife outside the Family Court in Dandenong. When society starts interfering with marriages, children and families, they are looking down the barrel of a gun."

The Blackshirts form only the radical edge of a strong and growing men's rights movement that gains mileage out of economic rationalism, the conservative policies of the Coalition Government and backlash to feminism. Other men's rights groups and lone father's associations have been condemnatory of the Blackshirts' tactics, but have shown an overriding interest in using the Blackshirts for political leverage. The Sun Herald (18/8/02), for example, reported that "NSW lone father support groups condemn the Blackshirts but warn that there are men in NSW who were angry and frustrated enough at the Family Court system to join the extremists."

Accompanying the proliferation of men's rights groups is a growing level of sympathy for the view that men get a 'raw deal' under Family Law and, particularly, in custody cases. A review of the media coverage of the Blackshirts demonstrates a strong belief in the mainstream that divorce settlements are biased against men, and that men are the big losers in family breakdown. There is very little discussion of the problems faced by women in marriages (eg. domestic violence) or of the reasons why women are more likely to gain custody of the children (ie. because they have been the main caregivers before separation).

The reality is a more complex picture in which the majority of custody cases are settled outside court and usually allow the fathers' continuing access to their children, even sometimes when they have been abusive. However, men's rights groups and the anti-divorce lobby have a strong force on their side in the form of the Federal Government, elements of which are aggressively promoting the nuclear family ideal and sympathising with the 'poor men' argument. Moves to weaken 'no-fault' divorce laws, the directing of women's funds towards the goal of 'saving marriages' and the stripping of funds from women's domestic violence help services are putting a dangerous level of pressure on women to stay in dysfunctional marriages. At the same time, cuts to welfare and other economic rationalist policies are putting strains on relationships and creating a climate in which people are inclined to search for scapegoats and latch onto regressive policies.

Fascists in the making?

It is in the context of current economic pressures on the working class and the social conservatism of our Federal Government, that the fascistic elements of the Blackshirts ideology also need to be taken seriously. At the community meeting, Debbie Brennan from Radical Women reminded people that "Fascism in the 1920s/30s grew out of scarcity. And scarcity today makes fascist ideas a magnet to working people doing it hard and who see no alternative answers. She said, "Among the Blackshirts are working class men whose pitiful pay cheques are garnished by the State for child support. But their sexism gets in the way of being able to identify the system, not women, as their problem."

For Fascists in Italy and Germany, part of the solution to capitalist crisis was to push women out of the workforce and back into the family home. They were enticed with bonuses for marriage and they were encouraged to produce a new generation, which would be conditioned to honour and obey their nation in the drive to war.

Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* (p.163) "In the case of female education the main stress should be laid on bodily training, and after that on development of character and last of all, on intellect. But the one absolute aim of female education must be with a view to the future mother."

Fascism's emphasis on limiting the freedoms of women and maintaining the patriarchal nuclear family, therefore, have an economic impetus in terms of its attempts to solve unemployment and increase the number of people dependent on one wage.

Conditions in 1920s/30s Europe were clearly different from those we are currently experiencing and the Blackshirts do not yet show all the signs of a fascist movement. However, it is not so long ago that a Campaign Against the Nazis was formed to fight the openly fascist organisation, National Action, and there is potential again for conservative solutions to social and economic problems to take hold and divide communities. Already, the Blackshirts have revealed plans to extend their networks to Queensland, NSW and South Australia, planning shame demos against women in those states.

The responsibility is with Socialists to not only challenge the Blackshirts misogynistic and homophobic views, but also to pose an alternative to the entire system under which women and queer people are oppressed. The responsibility is also with Socialists to ensure that our society does not descend any further down the road towards fascism.

A community campaign collective called DiSC, Diversity in Safe Communities, has been formed in opposition to the Blackshirts. DiSC aims to challenge the Blackshirts at the root of their anti-women views. In doing so, it will also address the systemic problems of misogyny, homophobia and pressures on working class families that give rise to such groups, as well as the inadequacies of the current political and legal systems to deal with those problems.

Diversity in Safe Communities

Support DISC - come to our meetings and get involved in organising against the blackshirts and all misogynist attacks.

**DiSC fundraiser
Sunday December 8,
3-8pm
Big House Cafe,
Sydney Rd Brunswick;**

DISC is planning a campaign of activities including:

- a rapid response network;
- victim support;
- a community festival for diversity;
- an art exhibition;
- and a major rally.

For more information, or to get involved in the campaign, email rebelflags@hotmail.com or call Meryan/ Riki on (03) 9387 7919.

Refugees - Anniversary of shame

By Lynn Smith

It's been one year since 353 asylum seekers drowned while the Howard government stood by

On October 19, 2001 an Indonesian fishing boat (codenamed the SIEV X by Australian authorities) foundered in the open sea. Most of the people on board had family members waiting in Australia for them to arrive. But almost everyone on SIEV X perished that day.

Howard, Immigration Minister Ruddock and Foreign Affairs Minister Downer were told by Australia intelligence sources in Indonesia where the SIEV X left from and when it left. The Australia air force had Neptune reconnaissance aircraft patrolling the area. Australian navy ships equipped with radar were also in the vicinity. Despite their subsequent denials, it is impossible to believe that the Howard government wasn't watching and cynically let these people die.

What's more, there is a strong possibility that they were directly involved in the sinking. A number of questions asked in federal parliament by Labor Senator John Faulkner (and subsequently followed up by reporters on the Channel 9 TODAY show) reveal that the Australian Federal Police (AFP) is involved with an Australian who works both as a people smuggler in Indonesia and as a source information.

Kevin John Ennis is an Australian who lives in Indonesia. Ennis took money from refugees promising to get them to Australia while also working as an informant. He boasted in front of three TODAY show reporters that he had paid Indonesian locals on four or five occasions to scuttle boats with asylum seekers on board.

When asked about this on the September 29 (2001) edition of the TODAY show, Downer would only go so far as to say that "the Australian government did not sabotage any boats."

Yet Commissioner Mick Kelty of the AFP has admitted that Kevin Ennis in conjunction with the Indonesian Police Agency POLDA has engaged in strategies designed to interdict asylum seekers, where possible before they can depart for Australia. Kelty also confirmed that the AFP provides training and equipment to the Indonesian National Police (INP). Five INP teams have been established through this program and are directly involved in disruption activities.

A few weeks earlier we had the Tampa incident. An Indonesian fishing boat with 400 asylum seekers was intercepted by the Norwegian freighter Tampa, as instructed by Australian maritime authorities. The Tampa skipper took everyone on board and headed for the nearest port (as is international custom). He was then ordered to stop by the Australian government and remain in international waters, just off Christmas Island.

The Howard Liberal/National Party government facing an election within weeks and widely hated because of its imposition of the GST on working people and small business people, decides this is an opportunity too good to miss: a chance to inflame racial hatred and suck up to the Pauline Hanson One Nation voters.

"It is our job to save Australia from the kind of people who throw their children into the sea" was the sentiment spouted by Howard, Ruddock, Downer and Co. as they produced photos which showed Australian navy sailors plucking young refugees from the water.

So-called "border protection" became the sole focus of the media during the election campaign: never mind the question of authenticity (the pictures were not of children thrown overboard but of people being rescued after their boat had sunk).

Troops were called in to make sure no-one on the Tampa talked to the media. And they were not just any old soldiers but SAS commandos... dehumanised through their own training to treat people under their control brutally and without regard to their human rights.

We saw helicopter pictures of a crowd of people squatting on the deck of the Tampa. But they were dots. The Howard spin doctors made sure we were not able to empathise with a single human face.

Laws were rushed through parliament to prevent asylum seekers from appealing to the judiciary if their application for refugee status is dismissed by Ruddock's department (a matter which is now being challenged in the high court as unconstitutional).

Unprepared to take a principled stand, Labor leader Kim Beazley went along with all this. "When it comes to border protection, we and the government are one" he whimpered, before voting in favour of Howard's draconian laws.

Many ALP members and trade union leaders were angry (you can tell from the number of Labor4Refugees groups which have mushroomed since the election), but their rumblings had no effect at the time. People to the left of Labor were outraged, but divided on how to respond. There were street demonstrations, but no union action on the job. Some trade union leaders (e.g. Paddy Crumlin of the MUA) made statements expressing their opposition to the government's action re the Tampa, but left it at that.

The political groups in the Socialist Alliance should have fought, as one, for an emergency conference of rank and file trade unionists, ALP members, members of the Greens and members of other left wing parties angry at the scapegoating of refugees and its implications i.e. allowing Howard to divide the working class along racial lines.

It is unlikely that the Socialist Alliance had the clout in the workers' movement at that time to have brought such a conference about. But this is not the main point. We should have taken a principled stand and shown that we tried.

Today, our demands are the same:

- open the borders to all who want to live here
- end mandatory detention

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- close Howard's concentration camps
- replace temporary protection visas with full citizenship rights

- no forced deportations: let the refugees stay

Workers should discuss these issues on the job and try and find ways to put a spanner in works... either through taking industrial action in support of refugee rights or refugee campaigns in the centres. Or by acts of civil disobedience such as providing sanctuary to asylum seekers who have escaped, refusing to assist in anyone's deportation and developing a union-approved code of conduct (say in the case of workers employed in the ACM-run detention centres who are members of the LHMU) which members will refuse to break if directed to by ACM management

New Zealand left regroupment

Bryan Sketchley

A regroupment of the far left in New Zealand is underway. Earlier this year, with an election in the offering, a number of far left groups decided to take the opportunity to work together and use the election as a platform to promote socialist ideas. Essentially two groups and a host of non-aligned individuals responded to the call and the Anti Capitalist Alliance (ACA) came into being. As it turned out they had only a month to campaign, and did so with four candidates throughout the country. Stalls and speaker outs were held in predominantly working class areas, and material was published and circulated.

Although the ACA began with a mere handful of people, the campaign represents the biggest left intervention in elections in a couple of decades! This will give readers an idea of the tiny size and influence of the far left in New Zealand! The ACA votes were 90 (in Mt Albert, Auckland), 52 in Manukau East (Auckland), 68 in Mana (Wellington) and 73 in Christchurch East.

To put this in perspective, the Communist League, which has been running election campaigns since 1971 and used to be the major group on the far left in the 70s and 80s, ran two candidates who got 87 and 63 votes respectively. ACA candidates also got, on average, about a quarter of the vote of Alliance candidates in the same seats, even though the Alliance was the third biggest party in the outgoing parliament, and had hundreds of thousands of dollars of state funding over the last few years.

Alliance collapse

The left-of-Labour formation called the Alliance has collapsed. The party had ten MPs in the last parliament and was in coalition with Labour. It went into crisis after September 11, with a split occurring earlier this year. Alliance leader and outgoing deputy prime minister Jim Anderton along with a small majority of MPs walked out. Several of these MPs retired, while Anderton and three others formed a new party, the Progressive Coalition, on the basis of the supposedly great record of the government and support for Bush's war on 'terrorism'. Anderton held

his constituency seat, albeit with a much-reduced majority, while the PC's 1.8 percent of the party vote gave it an additional MP. (In NZ's proportional representation, you need to get either 5 percent of the party vote to get any MPs, or win a constituency seat in which case you also get representation in line with your vote on the party list.)

The remaining faction of the Alliance, under outgoing women's and youth affairs minister Laila Harre, and including the section of the party which was a bit more critical of the 'war on terror' and wanted a stronger branding of the Alliance within government, was annihilated. While Harre came within 2,000 votes of winning a seat, Alliance candidates' votes in general were reduced to a few hundred. In Auckland Central, which had been an Alliance seat from 1993-6, the Alliance candidate got a mere 306 votes. In Christchurch East, where the Alliance had 4-5,000 votes in the early-mid 1990s, their candidate won only 288 votes.

The groups comprising the ACA have decided to continue to work together, and have begun producing workplace bulletins for a number of industries, including the teachers who have been in protracted dispute with the government for over a year. ACA has also launched a 'grass roots' anti poverty campaign in a number of working class areas, connecting issues like lack of funding for schools and health care, low wages and homelessness with the Labour governments pro boss fiscal agenda and support for the US's war on terror. They have also organised a conference of the far left, Marxism 2002, in Wellington for late October, and a anti imperialist rally at the gates of the US consulate during the conference. While there has been no formal amalgam of the constituent groups, the manner in which they have worked together has been instructive for the left here

British Socialist Alliance supports fire fighters strike

Leon Parissi

There is the prospect of a "winter of discontent" in Britain as the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and several other public service union contemplate industrial action in open defiance of the New Labour government of Tony Blair. The first big action, announced by the FBU on 18 October, has brought an angry response from the government which promises to 'smash' the strike. Socialist Alliance activists in Britain are gearing up for solidarity actions across the country. There will be a series of 2 day and 8 day strikes from now up to 24 December.

Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control staff from all over the United Kingdom have returned an 87.6% vote in favour of taking national strike action. FBU members were balloted for a series of discontinuous strikes in support of their current pay claim for a £30,000.

Andy Gilchrist, FBU General Secretary said: "This is a phenomenal result and shows the strength of feeling our members have towards winning this dispute. Not one Professional firefighter or Emergency Fire Control staff member took the decision to vote yes in this ballot lightly. Every single one of them knows only too well the risks involved in withdrawing their labour from an emergency service. Our members are absolutely determined to end the tradition of low pay in the Fire Service. Our members are demanding a Professional wage for the Professional job they do. All we are after is £400 per week take home pay which equates to £8.50 an hour. "We want to see an end to Professional firefighters working a 48 hour shift at the fire station and then instead of going home to their families, going on to another place of employment to get enough money to make ends meet. "

The FBU strike action comprises a series of shut downs across the country on dates made up of two 48 hour strikes and four eight day strikes up to 24 December.

The Pay Claim is for a £30,000 wage for Wholetime Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control staff. Pay parity for Professional Firefighters working the Retained duty system and a new Pay Formula to maintain these rates for the future. • Currently, Professional Firefighters are paid £21,531 per annum. • Emergency Fire Control Officers are paid 92% of this rate. • Professional Retained Firefighters are paid substantially less than their Wholetime colleagues i.e. £6.20 per hour. • Currently, Firefighters pay is linked to a National Formula which was borne out of the only National Strike ever in the UK Fire Service, in 1977.

Socialist Alliance response

Resolution of the UK Socialist Alliance Executive

"The Socialist Alliance Executive resolves to mobilise the Alliance as strongly as we can in support of the firefighters in their industrial dispute. We recognise this dispute as one of the most significant in many years - a potential "public service miners' strike".

The Government wants to smash the FBU's power in order to implement changes to the working conditions of Firefighters and Control Staff and the fire service in general - regionalisation (certainly of controls), possibly amalgamation of controls between Police and Fire (controls that is), and PFI (fire stations under PFI are already being proposed). (*Private Finance Initiative or PFI is a form of privatisation-ed*)

The FBU dispute is thus linked to threats faced by all public services. The Socialist Alliance should emphasise the background issues of union power and protection of the fire service as a public service, linking those with other public sector workers.

We note the rumours that the Government will seek to find legal ways to ban FBU strike action, maybe using the threatened war on Iraq as an excuse. We stand in militant opposition to that threatened war, and equally militant opposition to any such ban. We pledge our solidarity to the firefighters in any industrial action they may take which the Government calls illegal. We reaffirm our commitment to the repeal of all the anti-union laws, and the establishment of a legal right to organise, to strike, to picket and to take solidarity action.

Specifically the Executive resolves:

1. To assist and facilitate the convening of a meeting, or meetings, of Socialist Alliance FBU members.
 2. To seek to produce a special Socialist Alliance broadsheet for use in the dispute, the content to be decided, as far as possible, by a meeting of Socialist Alliance FBU members.
 3. To urge all local Socialist Alliances to make themselves central to the building of broad labour-movement FBU support committees in their areas, through Trades Councils or other channels as appropriate locally.
 4. To urge all local Socialist Alliances to support and assist the FBU in their efforts to visit workplaces and to explain to workforces the case for stopping work, on grounds of health and safety, when no regular fire-service cover is available.
 5. To support all workers stopping work on those grounds during FBU industrial action; to support and promote all other forms of trade-union solidarity with the FBU."
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“Mobilise to stop the war drive”

Letter to editor

The following letter from Paul Conway comes from the Workers' Liberty public email discussion list which can be found at

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

Dear Comrades,

Martin's article in the September WL, "Mobilise to stop the war drive", was seriously unbalanced. His extensive and correct analysis of the nature of the Iraqi regime & its policies was not accompanied by even an adequate mention of the nature of the US regime & its policies, let alone a serious analysis. This letter is conceived of as a corrective to Martin's article, not a replacement for it, and so should be read in that light.

Reading the article, it would be easy to miss the fact that the US is an imperialist country and its wars are imperialist wars, fought to maintain US power. While it is correct that the US & the other major imperialist powers are presently practising the "imperialism of free trade", it is important to realise that this is merely a policy (and a selectively practised one, at that). If the conflicts between the major imperialist powers continue to grow, a different & altogether more dangerous policy may be chosen.

A balanced assessment of the war drive would have included, as well as Martin's analysis of the Iraqi regime and his description of the calculations of rival US ruling class cliques, also an analysis of the imperatives driving

US imperialism, the source of the policies which Bush now seeks to pursue by "other means".

These imperatives work on two levels. First of all, the US is acting to preserve the overall structure of a world order which works in its favour. Sub-imperialists must not be permitted to operate without a license from the US or (grudgingly) some other power with a major stake in the status quo. Israel has such a license, but Iraq at present does not. Therefore Iraqi weapons of mass destruction warrant thundering denunciations & threats of war, while Israeli weapons of mass destruction are passed over in silence.

The second level on which US imperialism is working is the pursuit of specific US interests. This can be summed up in one word: OIL. Oil is essential to running an industrialised economy. Without it, the wheels of production & social life in general would grind to a halt. Further, oil is essential to waging an imperialist war. If you don't have it, you lose - end of story. It is, therefore, a strategic commodity. As a US general said when Bush senior went to war against Iraq in 1990-91, "Let's face it. If Kuwait grew carrots, nobody would give a damn."

The question of oil is not, however, merely a matter of oil prices or the profits of ExxonMobil, as important as they are to Wall St. Even more significant is the issue of security of supply. World oil production is scheduled to reach a peak between 2008 & 2010 and then begin a process of irreversible decline. US production is already dropping steeply as the Oklahoma & Texas oil fields become exhausted and even the Alaskan fields start to run out, so US imports must increase rapidly in a world where production will shortly start to shrink. In these circumstances, it becomes imperative, in the eyes of the US, that the hand on the tap belongs to Uncle Sam. When production starts dropping, the US wants it to be someone else who has to go short. Iraq has the world's second largest oil reserves and is thus a vital part of the equation. Further, since the US is widely rumoured to be increasingly unhappy with the activities of the Saudi monarchy, having Iraq on side would provide the US with a stronger hand in dealing with Saudi Arabia.

Workers' Liberty does valuable work in criticising the tendency of much of the Left to act as defence barristers (or even a cheer squad) for Uncle Sam's current enemies. We cannot, in good conscience, line up behind Saddam's bloody regime, but nor can we neglect to denounce the greatest & most violent imperialist power on Earth. As in all wars, so must it be in this one. The camp of the proletariat is in open opposition to both sides. Martin's article, while avoiding the former error, fell at least part way into the latter.

Paul Conway

Martin Thomas replied:

I don't think there's a real difference here. Not every article is written to be a perfectly balanced and comprehensive analysis of everything - particular articles have particular jobs. Attached is the leaflet we've done for the big anti-war demonstration here in London tomorrow, which is short but more comprehensive (though even that is "biased" a bit by

the need to address the particular issues that we need to debate with the other demonstrators rather than the world in general).

***Workers' Liberty leaflet distributed at the
250,000 strong 28 September rally
against the war, London.***

**For international working-class
solidarity – against the US
"globocop" and against Saddam**

Oil. That is why the USA wants to attack Iraq. US policy-makers reckon that their easy victories in the Gulf (1991), Kosova (1999), and Afghanistan (2001) show they have the ability, and give them a window of opportunity, to tidy up the Gulf.

By massive military firepower, they can end their stalemate with Saddam and establish a friendly and strong regime in the heart of an ultra-strategic region which holds over 50 per cent of the world's oil reserves. Or so they hope.

For them, human life, human rights, and democracy all come a poor second to economic calculations. They come second to the USA's drive to be "globocop", policing a world of ruthless free trade dominated by the giant multinational corporations and international banks.

The United Nations

If the USA gets a favourable United Nations resolution, that will change nothing in the real nature of the war drive. It will mean only that the USA has twisted enough diplomatic arms in the den of thieves that is the UN Security Council. However desirable a democratic world government, the UN is not it.

As his contemptuous reaction to Iraq's promise to readmit weapons inspectors shows, for Bush UN resolutions are to be used when convenient, ignored when not.

Solidarity with Iraqi people

Socialists have opposed Saddam's dictatorship for many years. We were campaigning against that dictatorship while the USA was aiding it in its war against Iran between 1980 and 1988 and its slaughter of thousands of Iraq's long-oppressed Kurdish minority. Yes, Saddam Hussein's regime is a threat, to its own people, to Iraq's oppressed Kurdish minority, and to neighbouring peoples, such as those of Iran (attacked in 1980), Kuwait (attacked in 1990), and Israel (targeted with rockets in 1991).

It is for the people of Iraq and the region to overthrow Saddam. Iraqi socialists like the Worker-communist Party of Iraq say: "No to the fascist regime of Saddam" – but also "No to war, no to US policies". We stand with Iraqi socialists and working people in their fight to win democracy in Iraq, with the Kurds in their fight for freedom – and against the US "globocop".

The Middle East

The US is out to replace Saddam by another Saddam, essentially different only in that he will be more pliant to US wishes. Along the way it claims the right to kill as many Iraqi children, women and men as it finds necessary to secure its aims.

And, after all the bloodshed, will the USA's "other Saddam" be less vicious and aggressive than Iraq's present regime? Not necessarily. The USA already supports a vile dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, where alleged adulterers are routinely beheaded, basic human rights are trampled on daily – but oil profits are safe!

The USA's close ally, Turkey, has already said that it will tolerate no independence for the Kurds in the event of Saddam's regime being overturned. The Turkish government fears that its own long-oppressed Kurdish minority could be aroused to revolt. It smugly asserts that "of course the Americans understand our position".

Iraq may have chemical or biological weapons. US/UK war against Iraq is the move most likely to trigger the use of those weapons. Bush's war may set the whole Middle East aflame, breed new Al Qaedas, and cost many lives outside Iraq.

There is nothing democratic or progressive in an "anti-Zionist" stance by Saddam which effectively scapegoats the Israeli Jews – most of them children or grandchildren of refugees, many of them opponents of Sharon – for all the evils of imperialism and capitalism. Anti-semitic myths about the world being run by a "Zionist-imperialist" conspiracy are poison.

The Palestinian people deserve our solidarity against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. But the way forward in Israel-Palestine is consistent democracy – the right to self-determination for both nations, Palestinians and Israeli Jews; two nations, two states – not the futile and backward-looking of seeking Arab or Islamic "revenge" by way of conquest and suppression of Israel.

Fighting for democracy

Until the Tories complained, King – sorry, Prime Minister – Tony Blair refused even to allow Parliament to meet to debate the war. He still can and does refuse to let elected MPs take a straightforward vote for or against war. When an anti-war member, Mark Seddon, tried to get a vote on war at Labour's National Executive, the New Labour hierarchy told he couldn't. They are doing all they can to stop any real debate on this issue at Labour's conference which starts on 30 September.

The people should be able to decide on war! The labour movement still needs to fight to win democracy. In the first place we must challenge the effective disenfranchisement of the working class by Blair's de-labourised "New Labour", and re-establish an independent voice in politics for working-class people.

In the second place, we must get rid of the Tory anti-union laws, and establish by law a workers' right to organise, to strike, to picket, and to take solidarity action.

Thirdly, we must fight for a democratic parliament, kept accountable by frequent elections and report-backs, which will elect the government – rather than having the Prime Minister, chosen by the Queen, then construct his Government and his "payroll" vote to control Parliament.

The unions

Even now we can make it untenable for Blair to continue backing Bush. The force that can do that is the organised working class.

Facing strikes by firefighters, Tube workers, and local government workers at the same time that it wants to go to war, Blair's government may respond by pushing emergency legislation to ban industrial action in essential services.

If unions follow up their strong protests against war at the TUC, and their support for the 28 September anti-war march, by insisting on their right to strike whatever undemocratic legislation Blair attempts, by bringing their pay disputes together in coordination and solidarity, and by supporting further demonstrations and civil disobedience against war, then Blair can be stopped.

Stop the war! Join us in fighting to win the trade unions to the cause of peace, international solidarity, and democracy!

Book review

Peter Nolan, 2001, *China & the Global Economy: National champions, industrial policy and Big Business Revolution*, Basingstoke, UK, Palgrave.

Reviewed by R.F. Price.

Based in part on a series of case studies of large Chinese enterprises carried out by the author from 1994-99 and published separately, this book has a broader scope. It begins with a section on "China's ambitions: building the 'national team'" of globally competitive national enterprises, and ends with a section on "China enters the WTO: choices and prospects". In between is a survey of "The challenge of the global big business revolution". The author holds a chair in the Judge Institute of Management Studies in the University of Cambridge where discussions and research were organised on the subject of this book, financed by both industry and government.

Readers may feel that all this is rather remote from the concerns of socialists. But they would be very wrong. While the author is clearly ideologically situated among supporters of contemporary capitalism, his honest and detailed account both usefully informs and stimulates the critical reader to question throughout.

For those wanting an overview of current changes in world capitalism Nolan's central section is invaluable. In addition to several more general sections he gives a summary of changes in the aerospace, pharmaceuticals, power equipment, oil & petrochemicals, motor vehicles &

components, steel, and coal industries and of changes in the provision of 'financial services'.

The 'big business revolution' is one of mergers and take-overs to create super-multinationals. Able to spend large sums on research and development, and even more on marketing (advertising), they at the same time shed jobs and hone methods of exploiting their remaining workers. At the same time their very size makes it difficult to impossible for Third World countries like China compete. This is brought out by comparisons with earlier industrialising policies in Japan and the "Asian Tigers", and in the final section on the effects of China's joining the World Trade Organisation.

For those of us who know little of the detailed workings of WTO agreements Nolan's careful examination of its effect on China is very helpful. He analyses the 'large-scale psychological and political adjustment' which conforming to the WTO Agreement will mean, and that any gains for China will be 'highly unevenly distributed' [p.221]. Further, 'the most powerful force of businesses will be US-based firms'.

The position of the US is brought out clearly, though Nolan appears to accept a statement of the US ambassador to China that the 'US government's support for the WTO "rests on a long-term commitment to human rights and freedom"' [p.210]. More realistically, he cites 'the desire to overthrow the Communist Party' and bring about a similar result to that achieved earlier in the former USSR [p.210].

Throughout it is assumed that the huge multinationals 'with their modern management' and ability to command resources and afford research and development is ideal. The long history of corrupt capitalism, of which Enron and Arthur Andersen are only the latest examples, is ignored, and instead we are given a number of examples of Chinese officials being executed for corruption.

The book ends, however, on an open note. In a brief section on the 'Uncertainties over the US economy' Nolan suggests that 'the future of the WTO is far from certain'. Having a majority of members from 'developing countries' it may no longer allow the US to dominate its policies, 'impos[ing] global standards on investment rules, on labour regulations and environmental conditions' [p.226]. And his final words are: 'History is far from dead. The uncertainties are great. The prospects are highly dynamic.'

Among the questions which came to my mind as I read were: would a socialist economy require the giant firm? What would be the role of information technology (in Nolan a key aspect of the global firm) in a socialist economy/society? What would be the role of imports and exports? Other readers will have many more, for this is a very stimulating book.

Film review

Wedding in Ramallah

Reviewed by Bryan Sketchley

Sherine Salama's portrait of an arranged marriage and family life, set against differing backdrops of the war ravaged West Bank and far away Ohio is an incredible documentary filled with insight and intimacy

Sherine Salama is an Australian film-maker of Egyptian descent. At the end of 2000 she went to the West Bank to film a documentary about arranged marriages and the lives of people in a war zone.

Her film follows the travails of Bassam, a Palestinian, now living in America, but returned to Ramallah to find a bride. The film follows his initial, arranged, meeting with Mariam. They are both nervous and introspect, surrounded by relatives and following traditional practices, they slowly get to know each other. Coily chatting in a coffee shop, with friends talking about the other. We also learn something of Bassam, he left the occupied territories 11 years before, after having spend 3 years in an Israeli jail. There, he endured beatings at the hands of his jailors, and is now sterile as a result. He has lived and worked in Cleveland, Ohio, as a phone repairman, married to an American woman at one stage. At the time of their courting, the second intafada has begun, and life is becoming increasingly difficult for the residents of Ramallah. As preparations for the marriage are under way, Miraim's family is crouched in the lounge room watching television footage of an Israeli attack on their neighborhood, the crack and explosion of arms punctuate their conversation. The attacks however don't stop the wedding preparations. Walls and floors are scrubbed spotless and Miriam goes to the hairdresser, applies extra make-up and wears her best gown. The marriage is a feast of colour and joy, with much laughter and dancing, a small crowd floods the neighborhood to see someone what has returned from America.

Shortly after the marriage Bassam returns to the US to try and expedite a visa for his new wife. Miriam has developed a friendship with her new sister in law, Salma, who is also

awaiting the return from the US of her husband with a visa. We are witness to the daily indignities that the Israelis (interestingly referred to as 'the Jews' by the Palestinians) perpetrate on the Palestinians, the pointless waiting at check points, being forced to cross into Israel on foot away from roads, ceaselessly being asked for ID. Miriam and Salma both become anxious for their husbands return, and the coveted US visa. Miriam and Bassam speak regularly by phone, but things aren't so good for Salma.

While Mariam struggles to come to terms with her life in limbo in Ramallah after Bassam's departure, family life continues as it always has. The older women bicker and gossip, the children play in the courtyard, the men sit by and watch and there is even a family scandal when Senora, the high-spirited, rather wayward wife of Bassam's brother (who is also living and working in the United States) buys a mobile phone without her absent husband's consent.

Speaking no English, nor with the will to learn, we share Mariam's solitary existence, isolated by day in the small suburban apartment, with only the phone as her contact to the outside world. The juxtaposition of man and woman's role is fascinating; the role of the wife goes no further than that of homemaker. She cooks, cleans and brings her husband's slippers after work. A Wedding in Ramallah is an extraordinary insight into a culture bound by its family traditions and those of its culture.

What struck me most about 'Wedding in Ramallah' was the defiance of an entire population, of a nation, in the face of outrageous brutality. Primo Levi stated that in the concentration camps, 'brushing your teeth was an act of defiance.' And so it is with Bassam and Miriam, and their extended families, an unpreparedness to submit. Sherine Salama has given the world a glimpse of what life is like in the occupied territories, and begins to put give some explanation of why the long history of violent resistance to the occupying forces, and, ultimately, the necessity of a Palestinian controlled state.

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Workers' Liberty

Afghanistan's peace that isn't

Nicole Ashford

On 8 September, 15 people died in fighting in the Afghan city of Khost. Precisely why they died is not clear. We do know the fighting had to do with a dispute involving a local warlord, Padshah Khan Zadran. One report suggests he feels aggrieved that he did not receive sufficient credit for his role in bringing down the Taliban.

This is Afghanistan at peace.

Three days earlier, President Hamid Karzai survived an assassination attempt by a margin of six inches. There are suggestions that the attack was masterminded by the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Prime Minister whose forces are reported to include al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters. Two of Karzai's ministers have been assassinated already: Afghanistan's vice-president, Haji Abdul Qadir, was killed on 6 July.

The United Nations says insecurity remains a major concern, threatening to undermine the peace process and the transitional government. Many think it is only a matter of time before an assassin succeeds in killing Karzai — and the more he is forced to rely on US special forces to protect him, the more his authority in Afghanistan becomes suspect.

There are 5,000 international peacekeepers in Kabul — led for the moment by the Turkish contingent, which began its six-month tour in June. No country has yet offered to take over the Turkish mandate when it expires in December.

Outside Kabul, there are no peacekeepers. And there is no peace. Some US military leaders, even in the Pentagon, are beginning to ask whether the UN mandate should be extended beyond Kabul — although a recent State Department report seems to have pushed that possibility back.

Now that the triumphalism has faded a little, the US is beginning to realise it has a problem, one which the near-death of Karzai rather unpleasantly clarified. The Afghan President is the only factor, for the moment, holding the country more or less together. He's a

member of the majority Pashtun ethnic group, he fought the Soviet occupation, but he lived in exile for much of the '90s and consequently has no blood on his hands from the devastating wars of that period. He is acceptable to the major warlords of the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance, and to the West. Without Karzai, the US plan, such as it is, looks even shakier than before.

Yet already it seems that some in Afghanistan feel Karzai is too close to the US, too much Bush's puppet. Not that he has a lot of choice. He needs US money if any part of the country is to be rebuilt. He needs US special forces, it seems, if he is to survive the inevitable assassination attempts in the future.

Karzai has been trying to pacify his critics. He made a very public pilgrimage to the tomb of assassinated Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud. But to some extent this signals his reliance on the Northern Alliance, which controls the majority of ministries in his government and, on the ground, with its army, holds power. The West is supposedly helping to train a new Afghan national army, but it's a long process: even the most optimistic say the army will not be able to operate effectively before 2004, and breaking the grip of the warlords will not be an easy task.

None of the prospects for Afghanistan now are good for democrats or socialists. If Karzai can hold together his government, then the country may stumble along for a while longer yet. That will be more likely if the West delivers on its promises of aid and development money. If the government begins to fracture, though, and if local conflicts between warlords intensify, there is the prospect once again of chaos and war in Afghanistan.

There is, of course, another possibility: that the West decides it cannot tolerate such chaos, and long-term "peacekeeping" — in effect, occupation — ensues. That is not a possibility that many in the US want to entertain. They want to move on to Iraq. But if the alternative is a Taliban Mark II, they might yet change their minds.
