

# Workers' Liberty



*The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself* ISSN 1446-0165

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## Stop the US war drive

# Solidarity with the peoples of Iraq and the Middle East

## Troops out of Iraq

# Iraqi people still need our solidarity

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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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# Regime change? We say its not Bush's job but...

## Are workers in the Middle East ready to build an alternative?

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If any regime deserved to have war waged against it, it was Saddam Hussein's. Nevertheless, war by the United States and whatever allies it can pull behind it will not advance the cause of democracy and freedom in Iraq. It did not in 1991, and there is no reason to believe it will now. Last time we were quite lucky, in terms of the spread of the war, the involvement of Israel and so on. It seems possible that Ariel Sharon in Israel will use war this time as a cover to carry out the mass deportation of Palestinians they euphemistically call "transfer". In the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan, the whole region is more unstable than it was in 1990/91: Islamists did well in the Pakistan election, and moderate Islamists won the elections in Turkey. Against signs of renewed opposition in Iran, with student protests, there has been repression. Who knows what war on Iraq will detonate?

Faced with the prospect of war, many on the left seem tempted to say stupid things about Iraq, as though wilful soft-soaping were the only answer to militarism. Whether or not Saddam had a nuclear capacity, he has proven in the past—against Iranians, and against the Kurdish people—his capacity and willingness to use chemical weapons. These may not be "weapons of mass destruction" as precisely defined by George W Bush, but the suggestion that Saddam had no capacity to do evil, and that his refusal to let outside observers check is merely protectiveness of Iraqi sovereignty, is naïve to say the least.

Western sanctions have proved disastrous, and have signally failed to remove Saddam from power. But the regime was not an innocent victim of "imperialist" oppression (and there are those within it who have made fortunes playing the system).

The Ba'ath's "anti-Zionism" is not something to applaud either. War by Iraq on Israel would be a catastrophe in terms of regional, if not world, peace. It would also be an act of chauvinistic, demagogic aggression at best, of genocidal madness at worst. (And for those not persuaded that Israeli civilians don't deserve to be suffocated by poison gas, consider that the weapons don't distinguish between Jews and Arabs.) Like other Arab nationalist regimes, and more so than most, the Ba'ath had used the enemy "over there" in Jerusalem as a demagogic diversion from internal issues. Then, when it counted, it failed the Palestinians utterly.

Soft apologetics for the Ba'ath are, indeed, reminiscent of the attitudes, historically, of Iraqi Stalinism, hoodwinked by the regime's rhetoric and nationalisation measures into seeing it as "anti-imperialist" (and, in their case, embarking on a "non-capitalist road to development").

There must be only so many disasters Saddam Hussein could preside over and survive. If the Iraqi opposition was stronger—meaning politically as well as organisationally,

or numerically, stronger—his survival would have already have seriously been in question. That it is not is above all the responsibility of the ICP; but the curiosities of Iraqi politics run deeper than merely a particularly large and particularly bankrupt communist party. Why is it that alternatives to mainstream Stalinism have also been so rare in Iraq? A breakaway in the mid 1960s was more or less Maoist, not untypical of splits in the Stalinist movement. More radical alternatives have been non-existent. Across the border in Iran, this was not so. Whatever their undoubted deficiencies, the Iranian Left produced, in the 1970s, a host of organisations outside the orbit of mainstream Stalinism, or for that matter of Maoism. The Fedayin, the Mujaheddin and others, in their different ways, reflected a much richer political culture. There were Trotskyists in Iran—not a mass force, but a presence at least.

More, the working class itself was an explosive revolutionary and democratic force. The Iraqi working class seems to have played little role since it helped try to prevent the violent overthrow of Qassim, nearly 40 years ago. Perhaps this is not true, and an impression created only by too little information coming out of the country. It would be good to think so. But certainly there seems to be little evidence of even simple levels of working class activity, over wages and conditions, let alone political questions, under the Ba'ath regime. Compared with the state of affairs when the monarchy was overthrown, this is an extraordinary fact. It is as if the fundamental outcome of the whole era of bourgeois Arab nationalism has been to reduce, not increase, the role of the working class in political life. This is a picture which seems to be repeated across the Arab world. The working class was more important, politically, in the 1940s and 50s than, on the whole, it is now.

In Iraq there seems to be little by way of an Islamist movement, either, which is some blessing.

The weakness of the opposition is, in part, a result of the sheer weight of Ba'ath rule. The regime in Iraq was much closer to a Stalinist state, as in the USSR and Eastern Europe before 1989/90, than anywhere else in the Middle East, with a vast party apparatus, bureaucracy of careerists, and apparatus of torturers. In that sense it is more than military dictatorship—its tentacles of social control spread much wider, deeper and more perniciously, than, say, the Nasserite state in Egypt. It is hard to think of Iraq without imagining a dark, mind-crushing place, much more culturally primitive even than fundamentalist Iran.

Other dictatorships have fallen, suddenly, to mass upheavals. Perhaps there is an Iraqi equivalent of Eastern Europe in 1989 about to happen: under the surface, a great revolt is germinating. Let us hope so. But the evidence, at least for now and perhaps superficially, is that Ba'athist rule has been a terrible, crushing burden, forcing most Iraqis to think only of sheer survival.

Helping a democratic socialist, and working class opposition emerge, take on life, breathe, is a major task for socialists outside Iraq. When Saddam falls, though there may be a sudden mass movement, more likely in the first place it will be because the army moves against him. Western pressure will probably then encourage elections, some kind of parliament, which will be unlikely to prove stable.

Of course we want to see, and encourage, a mass movement, and a powerful working class leading it. In any democratic opening there may be chances for working class organisation which should be seized upon; a task of solidarity will be to help the workers' movement grow. In the first place we have to fight the likelihood of yet another devastating war, still more death and destruction rained down on the Iraqi people—no more likely than before to bring an end to their suffering at the same time as it destroys their under-resourced hospitals and schools. In any event, big changes are likely in Iraq in the near future.

## Melbourne unionists organise against the war.

Bryan Sketchley

For several months rank and file trade unionists and officials have been meeting weekly to discuss how best they can contribute to the burgeoning anti war movement, and plan actions against Australian involvement in the war. Well attended early meetings of 'Workers against the war' revealed a high degree of opposition to Australian involvement in the war amongst union activists and many union leaderships. Motions were passed condemning Australian involvement, with or without United Nations resolutions, and committed various unions to undertaking education amongst their membership to discuss the issues. Further undertakings were made that the day after bombing of Iraq began a midday industrial stoppage and march through Melbourne was to be organised.

Over a number of weeks it became apparent that there was a need to address concerns that peace was in fact union business, and unionists have a right to express a view and organise against the war. Press beat-ups began appearing that a number of unions were actually preparing to ban handling of critical supplies to Australian troops. Certainly, a number of socialists and union militants argued the need for bans against the war machine, recognising that in the first instance they would be largely symbolic and would not involve putting troops at risk. If, at some later stage, the anti war movement continued to grow and become more militant in its demands and tactics, then the nature of the bans being organised by unions would need to be reviewed.

The outbreak of war and the invasion of Iraq saw up to 10,000 unionists from a broad spectrum of industries strike and march the day after Bush signalled for the slaughter to begin. Leigh Hubbard of the Victorian Trades Hall and

Greg Combet from the ACTU, among others, made angry speeches at rallies denouncing Howard, Bush, Blair and Sharon. Yet no union leader raised the possibility of the union movement organising strikes against the war, or placing bans on strategic industries.

To date, the anti war movement has shown an incredible ability to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people around the country. And to continue to turn tens of thousands of people out in a myriad of actions and meetings. There has been no precedent for such a vast and unified voice of opposition around the globe, on any issue. And not just in third world countries that have experienced and know what the US and its allies mean when they talk of 'liberating a people', but right across Europe and the first world. A vast majority of people are opposed to the 'coalition of the willing' plans for Iraq, and the Middle East. How is that supposed democracies can flagrantly ignore the expressed desire of its citizens? Clearly, marching in the streets in hundreds of thousands hasn't worked.

As socialists, we look to previous working class movements that have organised against war. History is filled with examples of where workers in aggressor nations have organised and taken industrial action against 'their' government, from strikes in the US during the Vietnam war to Australian maritime workers refusing to load raw materials bound for Japan during WW2. These types of examples are important today for two reasons. Firstly, we know that despite intense growth of patriotism and nationalist fervor, key groups of workers can see through the lies that war is somehow in the national interest. More importantly however, sections of workers are willing to do something tangible to hinder the war effort of the government. And this is what is qualitatively different between hundreds of thousands clogging city streets, asking the government to reconsider its position on the war, and workers in key industries stopping the production, movement or supply of the materials necessary to wage war.

That doesn't mean however, that we feel that only those employed in key industries can take effective action. Socialists at 'Workers against the war' meetings have argued for the need for generalised strike action, across all industries – the public service, hospitality, manufacturing, transport, etc. If such a movement was to get off the ground and gather pace, Howard and the ruling class would need to seriously consider if the cost of lost production, and the associated massive social rifts, were actually costing more than Australian involvement in the war.

The prospects of such strikes and bans are very slim at the moment. Some unionists are reporting that there are job sites that are 100% pro war. The tasks ahead of us are then clear. Anti war unionists need to be arguing with, and educating colleagues who feel that the war is worthy of support. Part of that argument can be very easily made in a dollars and cents manner – come next federal budget Medicare and education funding will almost certainly be slashed to help pay for the war effort.

**Workers against the war meets on  
Wednesdays, 6.30pm at Trades Hall,  
Melbourne.**

# Boss watch

By Lynn Smith

## It's official: CEOs and psychopaths have a lot in common

A team of psychologists is currently probing the reasons behind a wave of corporate crime in the USA. They've found something that won't surprise many workers: that psychopaths and CEOs share certain characteristics. In particular, an ability to appear plausible and attract followers while at the same time hiding low self esteem. Robert Hare of the University of British Columbia is an acknowledged expert in psychopathic behaviour. As he puts it "boardrooms are full of people who have charisma but no conscience". "If I couldn't study psychopaths in prison, I would go down to the stock exchange" Hare added.

## If a company's profits drop the CEO's salary drops accordingly, right? Wrong.

Not for these tall poppies it hasn't, anyway.

COMPANY	PROFIT	CEO	SALARY CHANGE	CURRENT SALARY
BHP Billiton	DOWN 6%	Paul Anderson	UP 10%	\$7.8 MILLION
Telstra	DOWN 20%	Ziggy Switkowski	DOWN 1.5%	\$1.6 MILLION
NAB	DOWN 53%	Frank Circutto	UP 25%	\$1.9 MILLION
Woodside	DOWN 38%	J. Akehurst	UP 15%	\$2.0 MILLION

Australia's CEOs are the third highest paid in the world: behind those in the USA and the UK. CEOs in this country now earn an average of \$1.4 million a year, up seven per cent on last year. This is 35 times more than the average worker who earns just under \$40,000 p.a. Pensioners get a miserly \$10,000 per year.

## Want proof it's "blood for oil" in Iraq? Here it is.

Kellogg Brown & Root were given the job of putting out oil well fires even before the US/UK/Australian invasion of Iraq. And they got it without putting in a tender. How come? They are a US company. In fact seven contracts for the "initial stages of reconstruction" in Iraq have already been handed to US companies on a platter by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Why were corporations from other countries excluded? "Because there are classified documents they have to see" said a spokesperson from USAID. How's that for a trade barrier?

## Bosses' terrorism dwarfs the efforts of bin Laden

About 2,000,000 people are killed at work each year. This is the global estimate just made public by the International Labour Office (ILO). And it's just a small part of the carnage at work, according to Jakka Takala the director of ILO's Safe Work programme. "If terrorism took such a toll, imagine what would be said and done" said Takkala. Workers' Memorial Day, 28 April, is commemorated in nearly 100 countries, under the slogan: "Remember the dead, and fight for the living".

## Bosses conspire to deprive 2.2 million Australian workers of annual leave

Over 2 million workers in this country do not get holiday pay or sick leave. The vast majority are casual workers who now number almost one third of the total workforce: 27.3 per cent up from 25.8 per cent in 1997 (source-LabourStart). But struggling to find the money to take the family on holidays or pay the bills when you're off sick is only part of the problem for a casual worker. Because he/she has no letter of appointment or indication of future employment, a casual worker has great difficulty getting a loan to buy a house, a car or new furniture.

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Alliance**

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not the millionaires'*

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# Socialist Alliance

## At the crossroads

Riki Lane, SA national co-convenor

**S**ocialist Alliance is at a turning point – we cannot go back to the old ways of doing things, but we are blocked from going forwards. The impasse over perspectives has to be resolved in a way that maximises the energy and commitment of affiliated and unaffiliated members.

Our future lies between two extremes: in one, we start to work through the political differences in discussion and joint action, with independent members becoming more and more prominent in the Alliance; in the other, the ISO (or most of it) splits away and the Alliance drifts into an inactive adjunct to the DSP.

The DSP correctly identify the need for revolutionary regroupment, but propose an organisational, not political, basis for unity. The FSP correctly argue that such unity is only possible on the basis of agreed program, but seem to say they will not unite unless it is on their program. The ISO correctly argue that there are many people breaking from Laborism who can be attracted to a broad left party, but limit SA to electoral politics and some initiatives such as the anti-budget campaign on an essentially left-reformist platform.

Many independent members of SA are arguing for a more united party, while others are suspicious of the DSP's motives.

### Perspectives and organisation

The DSP correctly argue that SA suffers from a major lack of resources, and that maintaining two organisations side by side is a huge strain. The ISO and others correctly argue that to deal with that by having voluntary pledges and paid organisers would create a two-tier membership.

At a national level, SA is creaking at the seams. Branches have not paid their debts to the national office, jeopardising essential projects such as producing national publications. The pressure of anti-war work has pushed everything else into the background.

NE meetings have tended to be concerned either with general discussions of current politics, or with organisational matters. They have not been a forum for debate on perspectives.

This flows from the strong tendency to want to reach agreement on what we can, rather than having counterposed positions that isolate some groups. This has good and bad sides – it demonstrates the commitment to work together, but means that real differences are buried under lukewarm formulae.

The Tasmanian SA state conference brought home a few points to me. There was a good spread of people there, some lively debate and clear indications that SA can reach out beyond the ranks of the DSP – including some comrades who fairly recently split from the DSP. There are real possibilities to build SA around the state.

Comrades were eager to hear the views of a non-DSP affiliate. But, it was also clear that the DSP are quite dominant in the Alliance and see it as integrated into their general political work.

What is the way forward for SA?

Clearly, there will have to be a compromise between the various perspectives. Here are some rough outlines for what could be agreed.

Flesh out the platform into a more adequate basis for united action.

Take trade union work seriously. There seems to be substantial agreement with the draft perspective document – what we need is the political commitment to actually make this a high priority area of work. In the context of that work, our overall approach to the labour movement in Australia can be discussed and debated concretely.

Organise regular SA forums on topical issues that allow discussion of underlying political/theoretical viewpoints.

Aim to draw in new forces – union activists, the migrant left, independent lefties.

A regular publication.

A realistic budget and program of activities, with organised fundraising to meet the needs. This could include some paid staff – especially at a national level.

Acceptance that the alliance will develop differently in different places. See this variation as a positive – branches can be "laboratories" of different approaches.

## NSW elections

Leon Parissi

**T**he Labor Party government was re-elected for another term against a divided and ineffectual Coalition Opposition. The Greens about doubled their vote gaining an extra Upper House seat with 256,691 Upper House votes confirming their place as the 'third party' by displacing the Democrats. The much touted 'Green wave' however failed to unseat Labor in the ALP held seat of Port Jackson – their most likely chance in the Lower House. It is fair to say that the higher Green vote impacted on the potential for the Socialist Alliance to attract the left protest vote.

Lower House results ranging from about 0.4% to 1.5% were spread over 7 electorates. Lower House votes peaked in the more 'gentrified' left leaning inner Sydney electorates where the SA attracted about 500-600 votes in electorates ranging from 39,000-44,000 voters. (All figures here have discounted the SA result in electorates where the top of the voting list 'donkey vote' was a factor worth about 1% to 1.5%). The SA stood a full slate of 21 Upper House candidates with the benefit of the party name appearing on the ballot paper for the first time. The SA received about 4,500 or 0.15% of the 3,084,096 Upper House votes cast, as of 4 April, with counting almost complete.

This was the Socialist Alliance's first foray into NSW elections of course cannot be directly compared to earlier NSW elections. However a comparison with the Democratic Socialists (DS) (the largest affiliate of the Alliance) effort in 1999, two years before the Alliance came into existence, is still useful. The Democratic Socialist vote in 1999 was 310 votes or 0.77% in Port Jackson. In Marrickville the DS vote was 443 or 1.12%. Outside of these two inner Sydney electorates however the DS candidates fared marginally better in 1999 than the SA in 2003. In the Upper House DS candidates gained 7,638 votes compared to 4,500 for the Alliance this time around.

The Socialist Alliance effort was dominated by its emphasis on the need to oppose the war on Iraq. Most of the SA publicity and platform speaking was dominated by this issue. There were strong efforts to connect the anti-war stand with State issues through slogans like "More money for education not for war" and the campaign to write "No war" on the ballot paper. This is good as far as it goes but does not manage to differentiate the socialist platform of the SA from a similar anti-war position on the part of the better funded, more established Greens Party.

## Left unity moves in Britain

**T**he following article was published in our British sister publication *Solidarity*. It represents an editorial call for a frank assessment of the progress so far towards left unity under the umbrella of the English Socialist Alliance and ends by setting out some concrete steps for the way forward. We do not reprint it here in order to copy the British comrades. There are significant differences in the Australian political scene, the relationship of forces on the left and between the organised working class and the owning classes. The Australian labour movement didn't suffer to the same extent under the Fraser and Howard Coalition governments as the British did under Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher decimated British manufacturing industries, imposed draconian anti-union laws and inflicted the brutally defeated 1984/5 miners strike.

The 13 Accord years under the Australian Labor Party did nothing to strengthen the hand of workers against capital. Instead the result here was a greater emphasis by the union tops to damp down any signs of a fight back in exchange for... unfulfilled promises. While outright defeat of organised labour was not achieved by the ruling class in Australia it wasn't needed - profits soared. While there may be the beginnings of a fight back by British workers, with some exceptions such as *Workers First* in the AMWU, the same cannot be said of the Australian industrial scene.

The Australian Labor Party has not yet been gutted of its connection to organised labour to anywhere near the same extent as New Labour in Britain under Tony Blair. While there was a large drift out of Labor by leftists, either forced or voluntary, in the 1980's and more recently to the Greens the fundamental organic connection between the ALP and organised labour is still alive through the union vote at ALP conferences and a myriad of other connections.

Another difference here is that an offspring of the dominant force in the English Socialist Alliance (the Socialist Workers Party) is here the minor player (the ISO). The dominant DSP is pushing for organisational unity while the ISO is fragmented and at present appears to be unsure of charting a clear passage for its 'united front' strategy. There is no force comparable to the Greens in Britain. The Australian Greens are not a homogeneous force but they have the ability to attract much of the voting public which is disenchanted with the established alternatives.

Nevertheless the tasks facing the socialist movement here and in Britain are similar. The need for

If the Alliance can build real roots in the working class through community and union links instead of merely talking about it. If we can avoid the traditional, exclusive left bent on 'activist campaigning' which uses elections to build the anti-war movement (or whatever the current campaign is) and instead project the idea of seriously fighting for a workers' government, in a few years time the Alliance will be better placed to deserve the support of working class voters.

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*strengthening left unity through developing ways to build an internally democratic multi - tendency party is the same. LP*

## Unite the left to meet the new challenge

There are openings for the growth of the revolutionary left such as we have not had for two decades. The tremendous upsurge of opposition to Bush's and Blair's war on Iraq, together with the rise of the anti-capitalist movements and the as yet limited, but radically important, revival of real trade unionism in Britain, have combined to create this situation. A united revolutionary left organisation could now hope to recruit and politically educate thousands of new people. We have opportunities—and also dangers, in the first place the pressing danger that this chance will be missed. It will be criminal if we let ourselves miss it.

Unfortunately the united left organisation the working class needs does not exist. Neither, to a considerable extent, does a politically adequate Marxist left. What exists is a sizeable number of organisations which have roots in the Trotskyist tradition—the tradition of those communists who, from the early 1920s, fought the Stalinist ruling class which seized power in Soviet Russia and control of the Communist Parties—but have evolved and mutated in different ways over decades.

Typically these groups are organised as more or less authoritarian sects. For many, many years the groups and groupuscules in the neo-Trotskyist archipelago had little contact with each other, almost no collaboration even on things on which they agreed, and no dialogue at all over the political issues that divided them. In the last several years that has changed for the better in the Socialist Alliance. For practical purposes the Blairite coup in the Labour Party deprived the trade unions, that is, the bedrock labour movement, of effective parliamentary representation for the first time in a century. Sections of the Marxist left responded to this situation by doing what the French left has done with spectacular success—combining to fight elections. That has led to the creation of a loose umbrella organisation, within which there is more intra-Marxist dialogue than for decades, and some attempt to create the democratic structure without which long-term regular collaboration of different strands will be impossible.

In principle the Socialist Alliance might be made to evolve, stage by stage, into a revolutionary party in which its component organisations would achieve an organic unity. However, the Alliance shows no sign of doing

anything like that. Conflicts with the biggest Socialist Alliance group, the SWP, have already led to the Alliance's second biggest organisation, and one of the Alliance's founders, the Socialist Party, to withdraw.

There are two sorts of contradictions which probably rule out the Alliance's development into a revolutionary party. A loosely-structured entity like the Socialist Alliance which, though it does other things and could do more, nonetheless coheres fundamentally around one defining activity, fighting elections. It has no possibility of democratically resolving serious political differences except by its biggest organisation, the SWP, having its way and outvoting the others. That means that the essential political processes that determine what the Alliance will say and do take place outside the Alliance, in the component organisations.

The Alliance, whatever form of democratic debate and decision-making it employs, can only be as democratic as its component parts, in the first place its biggest, the SWP. The SWP, however, is an autocratic, not a democratic, organisation, with no debate in its public press and rather little internally. So, while the Alliance in its time amounted to a big step towards left unity and was an enormous improvement on what had gone before, and while the AWL is and intends to remain part of it, it is a very limited form of left unity—and, simultaneously, a barrier to the creation of organic left unity in one rational and democratic revolutionary party. We need a great deal more than that. The new opportunities made a great deal more than the Alliance both an urgent necessity and an objective possibility.

But is it really possible? What can be done to achieve what may now be possible?

Any answer to the disease of needless disunity necessarily implies an account of how we got into the present situation. Revolutionary politics is a process of grouping and again regrouping around answers to the day's all-shaping political issues. For example, the limited unity so far achieved in the Socialist Alliance is a regrouping in response to the most important event in working-class politics for many decades—the hijacking of the Labour Party by the Blairites. The core idea that led AWL to help found the Alliance (known at first as "United Socialists") was the need to restore working-class and labour-movement representation in Parliament.

Eighty years ago, the Communist Parties were differentiated from the Social Democrats and organised around a response to the Russian Revolution, the foundation of a new working-class International (the Communist International), and a determination to learn the lessons that had led to working-class victory in Russia in 1917 and apply them elsewhere.

The Trotskyist movement, which stood on the foundations of the Communist International, was also the product of a world-reshaping event, but a negative one for the working class—the Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR. The big Communist Parties and the Communist International fell under the control of the Stalinist autocracy that had seized power in Russia. During the world crises of the 1920s, 30s and 40s, those,

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led by Leon Trotsky, who stood on the founding politics of the Communist International were reduced to tiny groups, persecuted and often jailed or murdered by fascists, Stalinists and bourgeois democrats alike.

The death of Trotsky—murdered by Stalin's assassin in August 1940—the division of the world after World War Two between the Stalinist empire on one side and the capitalist powers led by the USA on the other, and the revival of capitalist growth and prosperity after the tremendous decline between the two world wars, meant that the surviving Trotskyist groups—many of their most experienced and competent activists had been killed, all over Europe—remained small and isolated, grappling with enormous political problems. In general, they suffered a catastrophic decline in political culture. Most of them adopted variants of the seemingly "successful" Stalinist party style of organising themselves. (An exception, in some ways a partial exception, was the political current led by Max Shachtman and Hal Draper). The result is the chaos that exists in Britain and many other countries today.

To unite the revolutionary left, or most of it, requires two things: political renovation and renewal, and democratic, rational, anti-authoritarian ways of organising ourselves. The two things are inextricably linked. There cannot be political self-renewal and living political development in response to an always-changing world without free discussion. There cannot be free discussion unless the organisation is free alike from dogma-worship, from indifference to the great and clean real tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, from the distorting power of high priests and self-designated prophets and colleges of cardinals, and from the suppression of minority opinion practised in most of the groups (with the consequence that sub-groups fight to make themselves dictator, or, if they lose, easily choose to split and found a new group).

Those preconditions are absent in most of the revolutionary left. One result has been a progressive political degeneration. The most striking current example is the SWP's descent into popular frontism—that is, cross-class alliances—with Liberals, in the Anti-Nazi League even with Tories, and in the anti-war movement with the Muslim Brotherhood (MAB), the oldest Islamic fundamentalist party in the world, which stands for something very like fascism in Islamic countries and within the Islamic communities in Britain.

Is there then no possible way forward? Yes, there is. The first thing is to recognise and define our situation as it really is. Too often people turn away in disgust from the disarray of the left. That only helps keep that situation in being. The pressing job is to change it by way of political renewal and organisational reconstruction.

The prerequisite for serious political dialogue is to recognise that the very structure of the typical left group is inimical to the open political discussion and debate without which no political renewal is possible. The way forward from where we are is to agree on the minimum organisational and political basis for an initially loose but organic unity that—unlike the current Socialist Alliance—would have the possibility of growing into one integrated party.



As the main political planks for a revolutionary regroupment we propose the following:

- Workers of the world unite! For global solidarity against global capital. Against all wars, except those of national or working-class liberation. Solidarity with the peoples of Iraq against both the war drive and the Ba 'athist dictatorship.
- Socialism, meaning not the Stalinist model but its opposite, a society reshaped on the principles of working-class solidarity and consistent democracy.
- Working-class self-liberation as the means to socialism; and, therefore, a fight for the political independence of the working class and opposition to "popular fronts".
- An orientation to the working class and the labour movement as they are, while fighting to transform the movement. Active support for and involvement in working-class struggles at every level, including the smallest trade-union battles. Democracy and open debate in the labour movement; for a rank-and-file movement in the unions. The promotion of working-class representation in Parliament, through independent candidacies but also through campaigning for the unions to assert themselves in Labour's structures, to fight Blair's New Labour machine, and to work towards a refounded broad workers' party.
- For a workers' government—a government based on and accountable to the bedrock labour movement, which will push through working-class policies against capitalist resistance: trade union rights, rebuilding public services under renewed public ownership and workers' and community control, taxation of the rich and expropriation of the great magnates of capital, etc.
- Consistent democracy, as a basis of socialism, and as something to be fought for in partial battles now, under capitalism; and internationally. The workers of every nationality must appeal to the workers of other nationalities with the assurance that they tolerate no imposition upon themselves, but equally seek no privilege over the others. Solidarity with the Palestinians, while also upholding Israel's rights: two nations, two states. For a free united Ireland, with autonomy for the Protestant-majority areas in the north-east.
- For women's liberation; against racism and immigration controls; equality for lesbians and gays.
- The building of a revolutionary party not as a self-sufficient sect but according to the logic and needs of the class struggle on its three fronts, economic, political and ideological.

And the minimum organisational basis?

- To organise in the workplaces and in all mass working-class organisations on the basis of majority discipline in action;
- Democratic structures, allowing free discussion and rights of self-expression in committees and in the public press to minorities;
- At least for a transitional phase, the right for minorities to have their own subsidiary publications alongside the party's main press.

# Solidarity with the peoples of Iraq

Report on public Sydney forum April 7

Lynn Smith

Workers' Liberty held a successful public forum on the theme "No to War on Iraq. No to Saddam" on Monday April 7 at the Casa d'Italia in Leichhardt, Sydney.

In her opening remarks chairperson Janet Burstall referred to the international petition (see [www.thirdcamp.org.uk](http://www.thirdcamp.org.uk)) which Workers' Liberty is urging socialists and anti-war activists to sign. "During the 1980s Iran/Iraq war the rest of the left said Iran should be supported because Iraq was backed by US imperialism and Iran was anti-imperialist" said Janet. She added that Workers Liberty did not support either government in that war because it did not benefit the people of either country. "It is the same in the war against Iraq now taking place" Janet continued. "Socialists have no need to choose between two evils: the US administration or Saddam.

"We are for the democratic right of Kurdish people in Iraq, Turkey and Iran to independence, just as we are for the rights of Palestinians and Jews to be independent" she concluded.

Vivienne Porzsolt, a member of Jews for a Just Peace agreed that a binary position on war did not deal with the actual, complex conditions in the world. Vivienne asked the meeting to address Australian troops now fighting in Iraq as citizens not as warmongers. "If they believe Howard's propaganda they will do great damage to themselves" she said.

Vivienne stressed the need to build alliances with democratic Muslims to counter the rise of political Islam. On foreign policy she said that Australia must be independent from the US, adding that the existence of Pine Gap (a US military base on Australian soil) compromised Australian sovereignty.

"We also have to recognise Jewish nationalism just as we recognize the nationalism of others. If people are oppressed as a nationality how can they oppose it any other way?" she asked the meeting. "A bi-cultural (i.e. Jewish and Palestinian) society would be fine but I don't see any bridges that would allow this at the moment" Vivienne continued.

She spoke of the demand for "the right of return" as a cover for evicting Jews from Israel. "Both peoples are entitled to be the majority on their own lands. Apart from Jewish settlers in Palestine, I don't think anybody should be evicted from their homes".

"We must oppose Jewish settlement (in the West Bank). Both Labour and Likud have encouraged settlements and this is a colonial policy" said Vivienne.

Jamal Darwand is an Iranian-born socialist and was a Socialist Alliance candidate in the recent NSW state elections. "We must be careful who we are supporting. Independence does not automatically mean people are better off" said Jamal. "I was active in persuading Iranian

soldiers to defect during the Iran/Iraq war. This was just a conflict between governments. Ordinary people became victims.”

Layla Mohammed is an Iraqi-born socialist and a member of the Australian Committee for Defending Iraqi Women's Rights. “The war against Iraq we are seeing now is not justified in any way. The Iraqi people will pay for this” she began. “The US wants to bring tribal sheiks and Iraqi generals into power: these people are reactionaries with no respect for human rights and women's rights” said Layla.

“We are not against Islam. We are for the separation of the state from religion. Look at Iran where women can be stoned for having a relationship outside marriage. Look at Nigeria where the same thing happens.

“This war will strengthen political Islam... give it the opportunity to grow again”.

“I don't agree with the leftists in Australia who stress the repression of Muslims here. It's not just Muslims but all refugees who are the victims of racist attacks. Iraqi people should not all be labelled as Muslim” Layla continued.

“All the people are under attack by Saddam: Sunni, Kurdish, Shiites, Christians... everyone.

“We should support the rights of the Kurdish people to a referendum and independence. But we must make sure it is what the majority wants. Since 1991 the Kurds in the north have had a kind of separation. But some of the Kurdish political parties are in total support of US policy. The Kurdish people in the supposedly independent areas are hungry and have no civil rights. I was there only a few months ago and saw this for myself” said Layla.

“The capitalist press talks a lot about the desire of the Shiites for separation. I don't think this is true. Other than the Kurdish people, all the rest of the people of Iraq are Arabs. Why would they want to be separate?

“This is what we demand:

- lift the sanctions imposed in Iraq by the US and the UN
- give the people the chance to decide their own future (they don't trust the US troops and they don't trust the policies of the Iraqi bourgeois class which led them into the Iran/Iraq war)
- for a radical government elected by the people which separates the state from religion, recognizes women's and children's rights and is for unconditional equality between men and women

The meeting concluded with some lively discussion and contributions from the floor.

## USA as “Hyperpower”

Martin Thomas

**T**oday's US “hyperpower” is fundamentally structural power within a world of more-or-less free trade, different from the old colonial empires of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century and their more-or-less organised trade blocs.

As the home of the dollar, the basic currency of world trade and financial reserves worldwide; as the home of

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the world's prime credit markets; as the possessor of the world's largest single home market, the USA has great power.

The US government is the most powerful voice in IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the G8, etc. The USA's military hyperpower positions it as the “globocop” which polices the state fabric of the world market, doing it in its own way and at its own tempo.

How does this fit in with the concept of “imperialism”? That has been one of the most frequent questions in discussions.

If we understand “imperialism” in the sense of the late 19th and early 20th centuries — the competitive drive by a few big advanced capitalist powers not only to seize colonies but also to organise them into more-or-less integrated “empires” — then it was replaced by a further stage of capitalist development after World War Two. However, that usage would be pedantry. The word “imperialism” long ago came to cover other forms of the general tendency within capitalism for uneven development and for the stronger, richer centres of capital to squeeze, dominate and plunder the weaker.

Today we have an “imperialism of free trade”, based on politically independent states which organise and structure their countries' economies in order to gain position in the world market, and lynchpinned by one particular state, the USA.

One important difference between this and the old “high imperialism” is that conflicts between smaller powers and bigger ones today more often have the character of smaller capitals fighting bigger capitals for relative advantage than that of oppressed peoples fighting colonial rulers for national independence. While socialists side with oppressed nations fighting for independence — even under bourgeois leadership — we do not side with small capital against big.

To look to the anti-USA battles of smaller, “paleo-imperialist” centres — Iraq or Serbia, say — to bring progress is false. However, the modern world system does produce a potent force for progress. It unifies the world as never before, and expands the wage-working class as never before.

When Karl Marx wrote “workers of the world, unite” in 1848, the wage-working class scarcely existed outside a few countries of Western Europe. Today Asia has more trade unionists than Europe. The material possibilities of communication and linking-up between organised workers in different countries are much greater.

In, and against, the world united under US hyperpower, we can fight, not for a “multipolar” world of many openly-clashing regional capitalist powers, but for a world united by the working class. Campaigns like “No Sweat” are vital to make the necessary links.

Other analyses of the modern world system point to different political conclusions. Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, in their best-selling book *Empire*, see the world as a “smooth space” in which the power of states has

withered. That analysis has led Hardt to appeal to the forces of "Empire" — transnational corporations, international banks, and so on — to stop the USA conducting its war on Iraq, which he sees as a strange throwback.

Books such as John Pilger's *Hidden Agendas*, and many left-wing pamphlets, see what is happening today as the colonial or semi-colonial "reconquest" by the USA of the ex-colonial world, so that socialists should side with pretty much anyone who clashes with the USA.

John Rees, Alex Callinicos and others in the British Socialist Workers Party (to which the ISO in Australia is affiliated), at least in their more theoretical writings, propose a different view. They say that the end of the Cold War, by unfreezing alignments, opened up a period of a "new imperialism" in which the USA is battling it out for hegemony with the other larger capitalist powers. Thus proxy wars: over Kosova in 1999 the USA was essentially combatting the European Union, not Serbia; over Afghanistan in 2001 the USA was essentially combatting Russia and the EU, not the Taliban. However, from the claim that big-power rivalries define "imperialism" today as essentially akin to that of 100 years ago, they draw political conclusions similar to those of the simple "US-empire" theorists.

## Letters

The following letter was published in the NSW Labor Council's Web based *Workers Online*, Issue No. 173 (<http://workers.labor.net.au/>)

Dear Workers Online,

I am extremely disappointed as a trade unionist and a parent of a high school student that Labor Council officers and the Walk against the War Coalition have condemned the organisers of the student protest on 26 March, for the violence that occurred.

All the students and adults who were there who I have spoken to identify the police behaviour as intimidating and provocative from the start.

But more to the point is that the protesting students are expressing their moral outrage at what we all know to be a moral and humanitarian outrage - this war on Iraq, and Howard's conduct of it against our will. John Howard is in a position of strength because he concedes no errors on his side, never condemns his own. It should not matter what errors the students or their leaders may have committed. They are on our side against this war. The real damage is being done to the anti-war movement not by the students, but by their disloyal critics. Their actions show greater concern for the hypocritical opinion of a biased, hysterical, racist and war-mongering media, than for the need to do something more effective to stop this war than to rally in our tens of thousands on weekends. The politics of polite protest are not stopping this war. The Walk Against the War Coalition does not seem to recognise this problem.

Youth who care enough about public affairs, who have a conscience, who take a moral stand deserve recognition from the labour movement. They are precious potential rejuvenators of an aging trade union movement. They deserve support and assistance, loyal guidance or

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gentle criticism for the inevitable errors of youth, and defence from the jackals of the press and the police. Union leaders should be relating to the students who were at the protest, and not isolating and weakening them by condemning the protest organisers for any miscalculations or errors of judgement they might have made.

This should have been an opportunity for the trade union movement to show what unionists can do, with commitment and discipline, how union marshalls can protect students from the police, and help them to maintain discipline, make strategic decisions democratically about when and where to proceed. If Labor Council officers had refrained from rushing to condemn the leaders of the student stoppages, and instead had offered practical solidarity to the students against the police, then the students who attended the 26 March protest would have been able to come back again on 2 April. They would have had their eyes opened to the power of unions to stand up for democratic rights against the NSW police, and against an unjust war being waged by Howard. Instead, union leaders for their own sectarian reasons, of antagonism towards the DSP and Resistance, and to please Costa and Carr (who gleefully crossed a workers comp picket line less than 2 years ago), have stupidly lost a chance to!

win passionate and committed youth to unionism, and have strengthened the hand of the police in NSW to suppress protest action.

Janet Burstall

## Book reviews

*In the Shadow of the Liberator: Hugo Chavez and the transformation of Venezuela* by Richard Gott (Verso).

Reviewed by Harry Peters

Richard Gott is one of those upper class Stalinists whose hatred of imperialism has led them to embrace all kinds of reactionary and populist forces.

Gott's affection for Third World despots is notorious — and finds expression in this book in some sycophancy towards "world statesmen of the calibre of Saddam Hussein, Gadafy and Khatami". Chairman Mao, Fidel Castro and a host of other tyrants all get a nod and a wink — and of the working class we hear virtually nothing. So it's no surprise to find that this book is an uncritical, simpering eulogy of the beleaguered President of Venezuelan, Hugo Chavez. Even so the book is worth reading — if for no other reason than in order to understand what's happened to the Venezuelan left — and how it has almost entirely dissolved into Chavez's movement.

Hugo Chavez won the presidency of Venezuela in December 1998, gaining 56% of the vote. In doing so he has broken the mould in Venezuelan politics. Since the 1950s, Venezuela has been ruled by the conservative Accion Democratica party, punctuated by spells during which the Christian Democrat party, Copei ruled.

In his first year, Chavez rewrote the constitution, given new rights to indigenous peoples, reorganised the judicial system and established a new single chamber National Assembly — created a Fifth Republic.

Since then he has won a referendum on the new constitution, helped jack up the world oil price and built new schools. The new constitution, endorsed by 71% in a vote in 1999, renamed the country, “The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”. In the last year he has survived coup attempts and lock-outs by big business.

Oil is the key to Venezuela, and the new constitution says the oil company PDVSA will remain a state-owned business. Chavez’s project seems to be to utilise the revenue raised from oil to finance state capitalist development in Venezuela, as other Latin American caudillos have sought to do in the past.

Gott says Chavez is in the tradition of “radical officers with the interests of the people at heart” — meaning ‘benevolent’ military dictators rather than right wing ones. Apparently Chavez admired the rule of Velasco in Peru (1968-76) and Torrijos in Panama (1975-81) — what Gott calls the “military road to socialism” — an oxymoron if ever there was one.

Chavez locates himself in a Latin American tradition stretching back to Simon Bolivar (1783-1830). Six years before his election, Chavez led a coup against the Perez government, which earned him two years in jail. Chavez joined the army in 1971, and according to Gott launched his own group in 1977. In 1982 he began to organise a “serious political conspiracy” within the army, calling the group the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement.

Perez, who as a populist in the 1970s had secured the nationalisation of the oil companies, embarked on a similar neo-liberal project to other Latin American leaders in his second term of office, which began in 1989. Upping the price of petrol was the spark for serious rioting, known as the Caracazo, and marked an important turn in Chavez’s thinking about the Venezuelan state. In the name of nationalism, Chavez attempted a coup in 1992, calling it off on TV but making himself a hero in the process.

Gott describes Chavez as a “Cromwellian-style soldier who aims to reconstruct his country on entirely new lines”. For Gott, Chavez is “a serious revolutionary trying to carve out a new programme for Latin America” and “socialist nationalism” lies at the heart of his project. Comparisons are made with Castro — though the Bolivarian revolution shows few signs of going down the Cuban road.

Chavez says his politics are “neither statist nor neo-liberal”. He says he is “exploring the middle ground, where the invisible hand of the market joins up with the visible hand of the state: as much state as necessary, and as much market as possible”. In fact his policies have generally been quite moderate, Keynesian-statist, with an element of social welfare and redistribution — but entirely within the bounds of capitalist private property.

And some of his plans are plainly utopian. Chavez apparently told Gott that he plans to reverse the movement of peoples from the countryside into the urban shanty towns — though we are assured this will not be Pol Pot style, “for there is no suggestion of coercion”.

As for Bolivarianism, it seems to me the aim of a more integrated Latin America (for example with its own currency) is entirely laudable. However Bolivar, whatever his exploits driving the Spanish from the continent, ruled shambolically, and is hardly a model for the present. Marx’s verdict on Bolivar was harsh but accurate: “What he really aimed at was the erection of the whole of South America into one federative republic, with himself as its dictator.”

Chavez has almost entirely hegemonised the left that existed in Venezuela for the last thirty years. During the 1960s and 1970s, when much of the left was engaged in guerrilla activity, there were a series of splits from the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV). The Radical Cause (Causa-R), formed in 1970, and the Movement for Socialism (MAS), formed in 1971, both achieved respectable votes in state and national elections.

Gott describes Causa-R as a workers’ party, but more like Green parties in Europe, and “not a traditional leftist party”. This is over-generous, though I think he has the MAS about right, as oscillating “between euro-communism and social democracy”. Trotskyist groups also grew during the 1970s, though they seem to have all but disappeared as well.

To conduct his election campaign in 1998, Chavez organised the “Patriotic Pole”. It incorporated his own Movement for the Fifth Republic party, the Patria para todos (Fatherland for all party, PPT) which had split from Causa-R in 1997, the MAS, the PCV and some other left parties.

A roll call of Chavez’s government gives some idea of what has happened to the left. Jose Vicente Rangel, the current vice-president, was the left presidential candidate three times before Chavez. Ali Rodriguez Araque, the minister for energy, was a guerrilla and later leader of Causa R. Luis Miquilena, Chavez’s first minister of the interior and president of the National Assembly, was the leader of the bus drivers’ union in the 1940s and leader of the “Patriotic Front” after the Caracazo in 1989. And Jorge Giordani, the planning minister, was the economic adviser to the MAS.

Gott claims Chavez is “the heir to the revolutionary traditions of the Venezuelan left”. It is more accurate to say he is the beneficiary of the collapse of the left — integrating the left into his own project.

Not all of this left has dissolved into Chavez’s party. Teodoro Petkoff, once leader and presidential candidate of the MAS, opposes Chavez from a social democratic angle. Douglas Bravo, a guerrilla leader in Falcon in the 1960s who was expelled from the PCV in 1965 to form the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party (PRV) in 1966, briefly worked with Chavez in the 1980s, but now opposes him from the left, with his Third Way movement. William Izarra, who Gott describes as “a Harvard-educated air force lieutenant with Trotskyist leanings”,

leads the Direct Democracy Movement. Izarra also worked with Chavez prior to his election in 1998.

Gott says Chavez is no Mussolini, nor a Bonapartist. He is "a man of the left, searching for a new form of politics". The problem is that his politics are not very new at all, but he has incorporated many of the forces that might more adequately represent the working class.

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***The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* By Tariq Ali (Verso, 2002, ISBN: 185984457X)**

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Reviewed by Clive Bradley

Tariq Ali begins his interesting and mainly useful book by declaring: 'In the clash between a religious fundamentalism – itself the product of modernity – and an imperial fundamentalism determined to "discipline the world", it is necessary to oppose both, and create a space in the world of Islam and the West in which freedom of thought and imagination can be defended without fear of persecution or death.' (p xi) But the central argument of the book is that American imperialism, in particular in its current incarnation, is 'the mother of fundamentalisms'. There is, consequently, a certain ambivalence in Ali's argument. On the one hand, especially when he is referring to his native Pakistan, he loathes the Islamic fundamentalists with a passion. On the other, he sees everything as in essence the fault of America.

Ali's book is polemical, its central target being the grim self-interest of the United States (and Britain, but mainly the former) in supporting 'friendly', but savagely repressive, regimes. His sweeping survey of the historical record is readable and helpful, if a bit selective. Unfortunately, it's all of a certain piece: one gets the feeling that everything Ali knows is from reading radical pamphlets, or indeed personal acquaintance with the participants in events. A review (in *Socialist Worker*, I think) of his memoirs, *Street Fighting Years*, published in the 1980s, once commented that Ali 'does not so much drop names, as scatter bomb them in clusters', and while there is a bit less of that here, there seems to be scarcely a poet Ali hasn't visited at his death bed, a general he hasn't run into in a restaurant in Lahore (an uncle, not unusually), or a war zone he hasn't inspected with Bertrand Russell.

At its best, this gives his account a vivid, personal flavour. By far the best chapters concern the Indian sub-continent, especially Pakistan, where Ali grew up, and Kashmir. In Pakistan, a succession of pro-American governments, most of them military, have brutally oppressed their people. East Pakistan, now Bangla Desh, fought for its independence in the early 'seventies and won, in the end thanks to Indian military intervention. The Pakistani Islamists supported the West Pakistani military in its efforts to repress Bengal. Ali writes with passionate disgust about the chauvinism which raged across what was then West Pakistan.

But too often, the image is of regimes from Egypt to Pakistan to Indonesia as merely 'satraps' of the United States, with no independent interests or dynamics of their

own. Rich as Ali's account of Pakistan is, on the Arab world the book is rather thin, providing surprisingly little information on Islamist movements even in Egypt, never mind elsewhere. For information on the Muslim Brotherhood and its splinters, for example, this is not the place to look. His dominant image, of American imperialism as puppet master, leads him to conclude, for example, that Saddam Hussein's 1980 invasion of Iran was purely at Washington's behest. The changing international alliances of the Baghdad dictatorship, and its obvious regional ambitions, confound this simplistic view. The same is true, I think, of elsewhere.

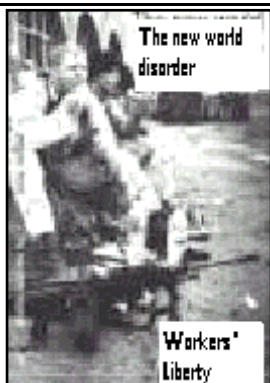
The focus, the indictment of American imperialism, leads to a strangely unfocused analysis of Islamism itself. Ali is good at drawing out the pernicious role of Pakistan in funding and developing, with CIA assistance, what was to become the Taliban in Afghanistan, and of the Wahhabi sect which rules Saudi Arabia. (His account of the 'triangle' of linked Islamist forces from the Muslim Brothers to Saudi Arabia to Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan is suggestive). He is good at explaining the historically right-wing, reactionary role of these Islamist movements, from Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood supported the British-allied government against the mass movement in the streets after World War Two, to Indonesia, where in 1965 Islamists helped massacre perhaps a million communists. But beyond this broad-brush account – American imperialism is bad and hated, Islamists have tended to be linked to imperialism, but now have filled a gap of opposition to imperialism – there isn't much of an explanation for why Islamists have grown, or how they might be fought. There is no discussion of alternative movements or possibilities. His chapter on the Iranian revolution does not discuss the workers' movement, only (sketchily) the organised Left. His survey of Indonesia makes no mention of the independent workers' movement which has emerged there in recent years.

On the other side, while his indictment of US imperialism is sound enough, the account of it as a rival 'fundamentalism' remains little more than a polemical assertion. What Ali means is that the economic interests of the US are treated by its governments as unquestionable determinants of policy, and that democracy and freedom basically play no role. But this – as Ali is at pains to point out – is hardly new. Why should there be a 'clash of fundamentalisms' now, rather than 30 years ago?

Strangely, Ali says almost nothing about the role of Christian fundamentalism in US politics – though it is surely here that the image of a 'clash' would carry most weight. Strangely, also, he is utterly dismissive of the notion that 9/11 marked any turning point in world affairs. Again, his agenda seems to be purely polemical (the peoples of the world have experienced worse than that for decades, imperialism has always been bad, etc). The current war on Iraq, it is true, was planned before 9/11, and perhaps would have happened anyway sooner or later. But that the trauma to the American psyche plays a vital role in ideologically buttressing Bush (and Blair, to a lesser extent) is surely a truism. (Moreover, one can't help noting that 'post 9/11' is the occasion for Ali's book, now in its second edition).

Ali was one of the leaders of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the 1960s. At that time, he was recruited to the mainstream Trotskyist movement, editing the International Marxist Group's paper(s) until his resignation in the 1980s. He always described himself as a follower primarily of Isaac Deutscher, rather than Trotsky – therefore with a more sympathetic attitude to the bureaucracy in Moscow. In the mid-1980s this led him to be an enthusiastic supporter of, and apologist for, Mikhail Gorbachev, declaring that the Soviet leader was carrying out 'the political revolution', that the USSR at that time was the freest society on earth, and other such nonsense. There is a 'campist' logic to much of Ali's politics. When it comes to Pakistan especially, he is too close to political reality to follow this through, and knows only too well that the Islamists are his bitter political enemies – as much as the pro-American dictators and corrupt politicians. It's as if the further he pulls focus from the subcontinent, the hazier the picture becomes, until ultimately he is exhorting opposition to 'the mother of fundamentalisms' above everything else. We should, of course, fight American imperialism – and British, and European, and Russian (Ali says nothing

about the growth of Islamism in the ex-USSR, or of the Russian war against Chechnya) - militantly. But if we are to make a world of genuine freedom, democracy and social justice, opposition to those imperialisms is only one part of the equation. 'Creating the space', as Ali puts it, for democratic, secular movements across the world, wherever religious bigotry and fanaticism exists (be it Islamic, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or Christian), is crucially important. Tariq Ali's book is only of partial help in achieving it. Read it for the chapters on Pakistan, Kashmir, and Indonesia. The rest of it is good, knockabout pamphleteering history, but not much of an analysis.



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(From back page)

### **Imperialism and national independence.**

Workers' Liberty sees national independence as political independence distinct from economic independence, which is a reactionary concept. We are for the rights of all nations to self-determination as a democratic demand, and a principled basis for working class unity that will remove national antagonisms that distract from class solidarity. We are for independence for example of the Indonesian minority nationalities, e.g. West Papua. We are in favour of independence for the Kurds, the Palestinians, and the Israelis. We reject the subjugation of nationalities, even those whose governments may have performed terrible deeds, by any other, as retrograde. (This topic is related to the previous one, in terms of the need for discussion).

### **The labour movement and the ALP.**

WL's position has always been that we cannot win the majority of the working class to support a socialist organisation and socialist ideas without putting a priority on working within the existing labour movement. We seek to challenge the ideas of trade union and ALP leaders on their own territory, and to struggle to earn leadership of working class struggles. This is quite a different emphasis from that which the DSP has, where unions are only one front, more or less equal to any other campaign, and often a lesser front because of the conservatism of the unions. The draft document for conference, prepared by our comrade Riki Lane, shows that some progress has been made on this issue. But it will need following up with discussion of concrete union issues, and measuring against SA experiences (such as the differences over the NSW workers' compensation dispute) to see if it can be applied with commitment by all tendencies in the Alliance. Further, a trade union education program would be an important supplement to induct new and especially younger comrades, into socialist union work.

### **Class and government**

We are explicitly for a working class government. Class is the force for change for socialists in politics as in economic struggle. Concretising this requires much closer attention by the SA to specific issues that affect the lives of working class people and oppressed groups in Australian society, and also an in principle commitment to this central point.

### **Radical campaigns and movements**

We relate to radical campaigns by trying to connect them with the organised working class, not just to claim a sociologically working class composition, but to relate consciously **as workers**. We have advocated this for the SA in dealings with the Greens, from the founding conference of the SA. We think the rise of the Greens

since then has vindicated our earlier concerns that the SA has failed to provide a clear enough reason to vote SA rather than Green.

These are central political issues that WL proposes that the SA should set about systematically discussing. Progress towards agreement and clarification on these issues is one of 3 factors that would lead Workers' Liberty to consider reducing the extent to which we organise separately.

### **The organisation of the Socialist Alliance**

The other two related factors are about:

1. strengthening internal democracy and
2. a regular printed publication (not simply an internal bulletin), open to all viewpoints in the Alliance.

We make these proposals because we believe that they are essential to having a conscious and committed membership in a multi-tendency party, not only because as a minority tendency we seek to guarantee our own political rights. We consider that it is a role of the leadership of any socialist party to make sure that all viewpoints are heard and considered. It is a responsibility of members to formulate and explain their disagreements, so that their ideas can be considered. These conditions help to ensure an educated membership, that is conscious of the basis on which decisions are made, and which is committed to the decision-making process. Members in a minority can therefore accept decisions even if not agreeing with them. Workers Liberty will be submitting specific proposals to the May Conference of the Alliance.

We propose a regular publication with an editorial policy of representing all points of view in the Alliance, and with minority viewpoints represented on the editorial board.

The editorial board should be charged with ensuring:

- That different points of view are expressed on significant issues,
- That editorial lines are clear, not compromise statements with a form of words to conceal actual differences.
- That regular news stories are solicited from members from a range of tendencies, and are published with their political nuances intact, not edited "for reasons of space" to match the outlook of the editorial majority.

If all tendencies can have their points of view expressed in Alliance publications it will reduce their need to publish separately.

### **Join the fight for socialism! Contact Workers Liberty today!**

Help to build a class struggle left wing in the labour movement.

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Or come to one of our regular public discussion evenings. Call for details:

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# Workers' Liberty

## Socialist Alliance

### Towards a multi-tendency socialist party.

**W**orkers' Liberty's top concerns are that we should not squander the current opportunities to overcome problems that have been dogging the left for decades. We repeat our initial welcoming of the Democratic Socialist Party's (DSP) proposals to work towards a more unified Socialist Alliance. We also welcome the statement by non-aligned members of the Alliance, asking the affiliates to make their proposals for the Alliance as a regroupment project.

The anti-war movement and the thousands of new activists it is generating make the need all the more urgent for the socialist left to take regroupment seriously. WL particularly appeals to the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) to stay with the Socialist Alliance project, not to retreat into sectarian self-isolation and to put forward its ideas for how the SA can progress.

Workers' Liberty's concerns for how the Socialist Alliance can develop differ from the DSP's. The DSP's proposals to date place a much higher premium on stronger, more efficient organisational structures, whereas Workers' Liberty is concerned with political agreement and the democratic right to express differences.

In summary we are for making sure that progress towards a unified party is the result of political discussion that resolves differences where possible, and clarifies the basis of remaining disagreements.

This is fundamental. Socialists first and foremost are distinguished by their ideas. Our organisational divisions reflect differences of ideas, and our weak influence in the political life of our countries reflects a combination of factors, including lack of influence of our ideas, especially within the organised working class. If the SA does not as an organisation share a clear and conscious understanding of where we agree and disagree, our unity will be fragile.

The development of the Socialist Alliance towards a multi-tendency unified socialist party will depend most of all on the conduct of political discussion within the Alliance. Activism will continue, leaflets will be produced, rallies called, street stalls held, campaigns organised etc. But without these activities being based on informed commitment, they will remain predominantly the domain of the majority tendency, the DSP, and they will not expand the participation of non-affiliated members or the other affiliates.

#### **Outstanding political issues**

Workers' Liberty proposes specifically that a number of political issues require much deeper discussion:

What is socialism and what can we learn history? We disagree with the DSP on the nature of Cuba, Vietnam, and the former Soviet Union. WL says that the former Stalinist regimes have nothing in common with socialism. The DSP says that state owned property is the foundation of socialism. We say that the self-organisation of the working class is the foundation. The DSP is proposing that the SA needs to publish a book on an introduction to socialism. Such a publication is essential for a socialist party, but the SA has so far not discussed what socialism is, a pre-condition to publishing a book on the topic.

#### **Imperialism and capitalism.**

How do we campaign for the overthrow of capitalism internationally? The DSP emphasises imperialism, implying that big capital and powerful regimes are the enemy, but not smaller, weaker capitals and smaller repressive regimes. For example the DSP has taken with alacrity to using the phrase that there are "two super-powers in the world today" - the USA launching war on Iraq, and the people of the world who are opposed. This is as if socialists in Australia need not be concerned about working class, democratic, secular or socialist forces in the Middle East, who are fighting their own repressive regimes (such as Saddam's) and whose enemy is not just the USA, but is also very much at home. WL rejects the two camp view held by the most of the left, including the ISO and the DSP, which says that we must be on one side or the other. Workers' Liberty is with the Labour Party of Pakistan, and the Workers' Communist Parties of Iran and Iraq, who do not support one side simply on the basis of opposition to imperialism. These ideas are in contradiction to the draft platform proposed by Dick Nicholls. Dick's draft is so imbued with the assumptions of the DSP, that we have found it impossible to amend. We would like to work with others in the SA to identify the underlying issues dividing us on this topic, and to collate a manageable reading/discussion program that would help us reach agreement.

*(continued on page 15)*