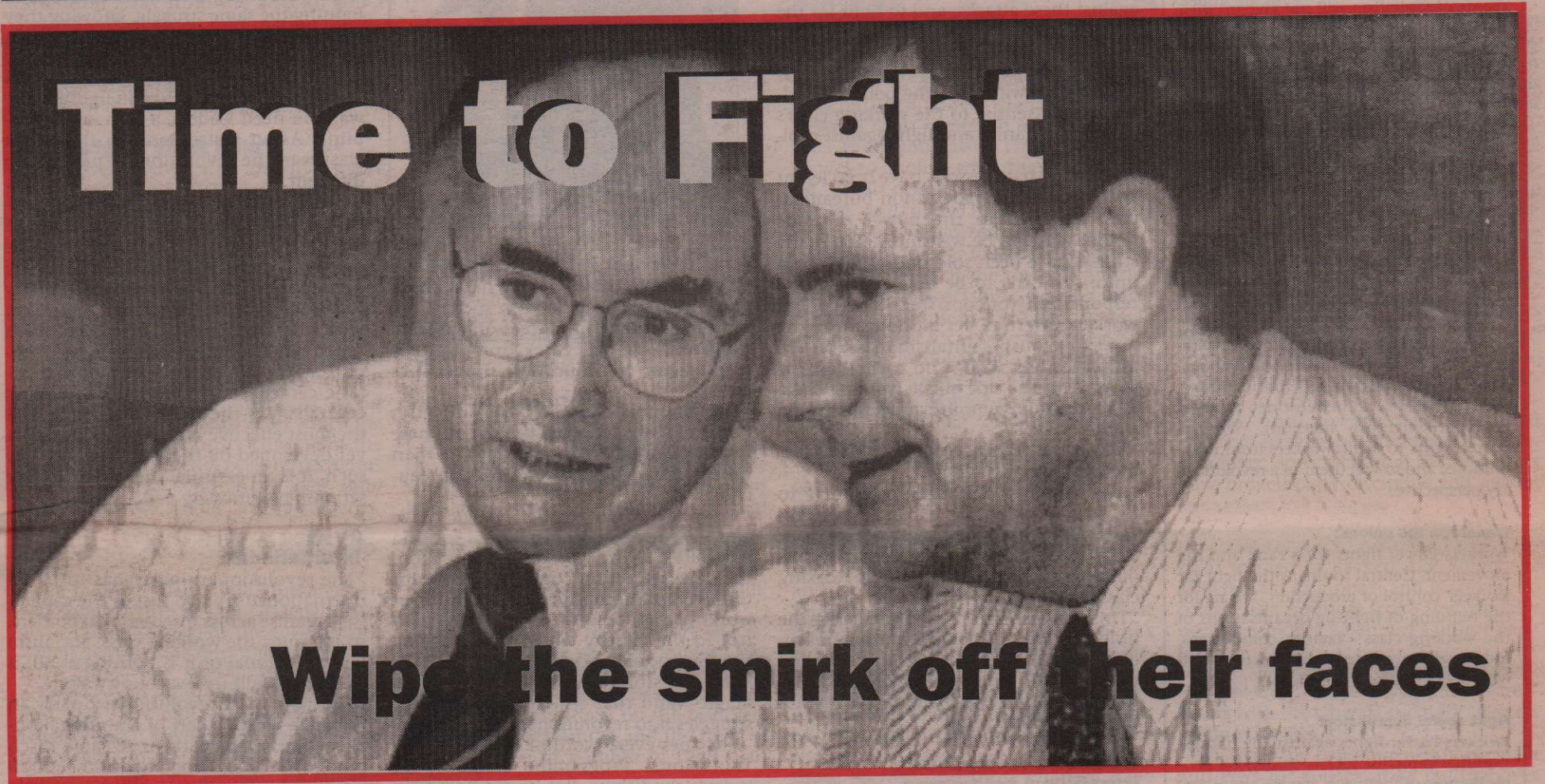
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For Workers Revolution, Socialism and Internationalism
Issue 2 July/September 1996 ★ Price $1 ★ Solidarity Price $2

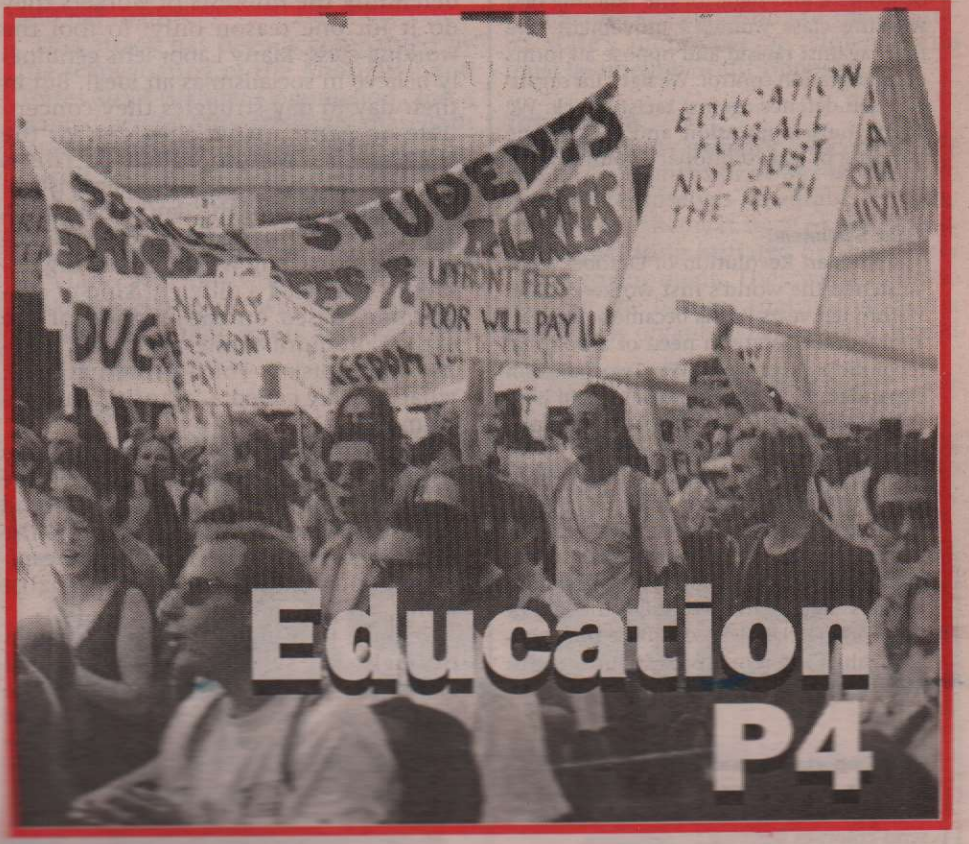


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WORKERS POWER

Issue 2 July-September 1996

Where we stand

WORKERS POWER Australia is a revolutionary communist organisation. We are the Australian section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

Our aim is to build a revolutionary workers' party. But at the present stage we have to assemble the nucleus of such a party.

Central to our programme is the strategic objective of abolishing capitalism - an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for private profit.

Why revolution?

We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class, and for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human needs. Only a socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal.

We recognise that since the forces and agents of capitalism will not give up their privileges without a fight, there can be no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party, and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia, can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat - a workers' state based on planned production and distribution.

What is the Australian Labor Party?

The Australian Labor Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party - bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based in the working class via the trade unions, and supported by millions of workers at the polls. As a bourgeois workers' party, the ALP ties workers to the illusion that capitalism can be reformed by legal and parliamentary methods. Workers Power fights to break workers from these illusions, and to win them to a revolutionary perspective.

Transform the unions!

Workers Power fights for a rank and file movement. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class - factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

Fight social oppression!

Workers Power fights against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, gender, age or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women, and fight for the building of a working class women's movement. We fight against racism and oppose all forms of immigration control. We fight for organised self defence against racist attack. We fight youth oppression and are for the building of a revolutionary youth movement.

Fight Stalinism!

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 launched the world's first workers' state. Within ten years Russia became a degenerated workers' state in need of a political revolution. After World War Two Stalinism expanded. Now the Stalinist system is in ruins. The blame lies with the Stalinist bureaucracy who usurped the banner of socialism and murdered countless thousands of revolutionary workers. In the remaining Stalinist states we fight for political revolution. We call the Stalinist states in transition back to capitalism "moribund workers' states". In these states the task of the working class is to combine the struggle against the remains of Stalinism with the struggle against re-emerging capitalism.

Fight imperialism and imperialist war!

Workers Power supports the struggles of the oppressed nationalities, colonies and semi-colonies fighting imperialism.

Australia is a minor imperialist country with economic and military ambitions in South East Asia and beyond. We fight to remove Australia from all imperialist military alliances and "peacekeeping" operations.

What Kind of Revolutionary Party?

The crisis of capitalism has precipitated serious and grievous attacks on workers and the oppressed.

The cutbacks to the welfare state, the large-scale privatisation projects, the attacks on wages and conditions, all show why neither the Coalition or the ALP, nor any of the smaller parties that confine themselves to capitalist parliamentary politics, can solve the crisis in the interests of the working class.

Workers need to organise to fight against these attacks, and to fight for the overthrow of the economic system that necessitates such attacks.

But how is the working class to do this? From where will come the political leadership so essential to the working class's ability to organise and fight against capitalism?

Too many hard lessons have been learnt at the hands of trade union bureaucracies, for faith in the power of trade unions alone to be warranted. Too many strikers have been sold out by their own union officials to be able to place the responsibility of consistently defending workers interests, let alone leading the fight to abolish capitalism itself, on the union leaders. And if no parliamentary party is on the side of the working class, what alternative political leadership do workers have?

This is the crisis of leadership that faces the working class today.

It is the most debilitating obstacle to freeing the masses from the exploitation and oppression that characterise our daily lives. Resolving this crisis means building a new leadership in the working class.

This new leadership has to challenge the hold that the Laborites and trade union officials have over the working class. And there is only one type of organisation that can meet these challenges: a revolutionary workers' party.

We need a revolutionary transitional programme

When Keating or Beazley talk about defending the interests of workers they do it for one reason only: to fool the working class. Many Labor lefts genuinely believe in socialism as an ideal. But in their day to day struggles they concentrate on getting what they can for the working class within capitalism. This is also true of many trade union activists.

This separation of the day to day struggle from the "final goal" is what debilitates most existing working class organisations. We need a different kind of programme, based on the method of the early Communist International (1919-24) and Trotsky's Fourth International: what Trotsky called a "transitional programme".

Our programme is constructed precisely with the objective of creating a bridge between workers' struggles to defend themselves and their conditions, and the ultimate struggle to rid ourselves of capitalism and bring about a new socialist world.

We have to bridge these two struggles through a system of transitional demands: policies which provide the answers to winning the struggles of today, and at the same time develop the forms of organisation which can mount a challenge to the capitalist state and economic system.

In every struggle we try to advance the principle of workers' control. We try to transform the existing organisations of the working class into organisations where workers can learn not just to fight the effects of capitalism, but the system itself.

So in a strike, we fight not just for pick-



et lines but the effective defence of picket lines. We fight for democratically elected strike committees. Where mass strikes and struggles occur across society, we fight for action committees drawn from rank and file delegates from unions, workplaces, communities, universities etc.

Our aim is not just to build up better forms of struggle today, though all these forms of organisation are better than those offered by the reformist bureaucrats.

From the picket line defence group we aim to show workers the need for and possibility of the workers' militia. From the delegate action committee we want to develop alternative organisations of working class power. From workers control in the factory we want to develop genuine socialist planning.

The transitional programme is not a magic wand that will convert workers' struggles into revolutionary struggles.

Nor does every word of Trotsky's 1938 Transitional Programme stand up in today's conditions. But its method does. And that method is what not only the reformists reject but also, in practice, the centrists of the DSP, ISO, SA, Militant etc.

What kind of Party?

The revolutionary party has to be made up of workers, students. and youth. It cannot fight for a revolution unless it bases itself on the daily struggles of the working class.

As such, one of the central tasks of the revolutionary party is to root itself in and transform the trade unions.

Alongside this it would aim to mobilise the most exploited and oppressed within the working class - the youth, the unemployed, unorganised workers, black people, women, gays, lesbians and bisexuals - in militant, working class oriented struggles.

The revolutionary party has to be a fighting party. It has to have a centralised leadership and know that in struggle all its members are fighting for the same goal.

Its leaders cannot be permitted to follow whatever mood happens to take them, or to speak out publicly against party policy. They would be under the control of the party as a whole. Party officials have to be the servants of the workers, not the other way round.

At the same time the revolutionary party has to be committed to full democratic discussion of its policies and tactics within its own ranks.

Without this there can be no development of the party's politics, no real education and training of its militants, and no possibility of correcting any errors the party might make.

Once a democratic decision has been taken, the revolutionary party would haveto implement it with maximum unity and discipline in action. Although the idea of centralism is unattractive to many influenced by bourgeois individualist ideology, the experience of workers shows that solidarity and common discipline is absolutely necessary in struggle.

Solidarity does not just mean back-slapping camaraderie in the working class. It means knowing you can trust others fighting the same struggle, knowing they will pull their weight and stand firm at all times. The principle of democratic centralism is only the political expression of that need for solidarity. In fighting any war you need leaders, a plan, and discipline. As an instrument for fighting a class war, the revolutionary party is no different.

That is the meaning of democratic centralism. Unfortunately the experience of Stalinism, and the lack of genuine democracy within many of the existing organisations on the left, has led many to falsely associate democratic centralism with the bureaucratic command of a select clique. But that is bureaucratic centralism, the opposite of genuine democratic centralism. In reality, democratic centralism is the most democratic and the most effective means of organisation yet developed by the working class. As such, it is an essential ingredient in any serious revolutionary party.

We need a revolutionary international

The revolutionary party has to be an internationalist party. Just as the capitalists organise across international borders, so too must the working class. Socialism is international or it is nothing at all: it cannot be built in one country alone.

That is why a revolutionary party in Australia must be part of an international revolutionary party. The same discipline, the same democracy and centralism that exists within the organisation in Australia must exist across the international party. The decisions and democracy of the international party has to bind national sections, just as the decisions of the Australian section has to bind each of its national branches.

Without international democracy there is no comprehensive way of learning from and fully assimilating the lessons of the working class struggle in other countries.

Without international discipline, there is no way of preventing national parties from adapting to the prevailing views and prejudices common on their own national terrain. Without a democratic centralist international party and an international programme, the very idea of internationalism loses its meaning.

Workers Power exists to build a revolutionary party. We are the Australian section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International [LRCI].

We already have sections in eight countries.

Wherever we have members or supporters we fight in the struggles of the working class and oppressed, agitating for the forms of action we need to avoid sell-outs and defeats, and seeking to win new members in the fight for socialist revolution.

We aim to rally the forces of the left around a genuinely revolutionary programme, so that from the discrediting of Laborism, reformism, and Stalinism, and the inadequacies of the other groups on the left, a strong, united and revolutionary party can be built: a party which can stand at the head of the working class in its fight for socialism.

Howard's Way:
Four Months of Coalition

With the Coalition's election in March, workers and students braced themselves for an assault on wages, education, social welfare and trade union rights. For his part, Howard knew that to achieve the aims of his party and its corporate backing, firm ideological foundations would have to be laid in the early months of his government. This would require justifications for breaking election promises; the identification of groups and issues which could divert attention away from the attacks; and a calculated release of information on the budget and new policies to prepare people for the worst. This is precisely what the government has attempted to do over its first four months in office.



The Budget "Black Hole"

The government's first decisive move came on March 12. Treasurer Peter Costello alleged that as a result of the poor financial management of the previous Labor government, the country faced a budget "black hole". This "black hole" would require $8 billion worth of spending cuts over the next two years.

Clearly this was a manoeuvre designed to justify a programme of cutbacks that the Coalition was committed to well before the election, and irrespective of projected economic growth (of which the latest forecasts seriously contradict the Treasurer's arithmetic, even in the terms of bourgeois accountancy). Not only would the "black hole" justify cutbacks, it would shift responsibility for their severity onto the previous Labor government.

The budget "black hole" justification was supplemented by an "independent" audit, commissioned by the government, which delivered its recommendations in late June. The audit, prepared by acknowledged right wingers Bob Officer and Bob Carmody, identified a while range of social services which would have to be cut - in the national interest, of course. As they put it, "The Commission concludes that the main expenditure areas generating pressure on the budget are health and age care, family support payments and age pension expenditures. Action will be necessary to moderate expectations about what support the Commonwealth Government can reasonably be expected to provide..."

Coalition ministers, in addition to constantly retreating behind the rhetoric of the "black hole" have repeatedly appealed to so-called "respected" opinion over the last four months. They have used it alongside selectively-released information pertaining to the magnitude of the cuts which will be brought down in the August budget.

Public sector

The first groups to warned of impending cuts were workers in the public sector and in tertiary education. In the former, the government heralded its intention to slash funding to a broad range of social programmes which would mean the loss of up to 20,000 jobs. Already it has confirmed that 28 Commonwealth Employment Service offices will be closed, in addition to the closures of many social security, customs, taxation and Medicare offices.

This announcement was followed shortly after by education minister Amanda Vanstone's declaration that between 5 and 12% of the education budget would be cut over the next year. This would contribute up to $1.8 billion to the "savings task". It would also contribute to the closure of university departments, the loss of thousands of jobs, and an erosion of the quality of educational services throughout the system. Vanstone made it clear that students would also have to pay more for their education, to make up for the inevitable funding shortfalls.

Discontent over the spending cuts has soared, with strikes and pickets occurring around the country. However, the Government has clearly managed to convince sections of the community, including trade union leaders and university vice-chancellors, that cuts are necessary. This has already weakened resistance to the cutbacks by lending legitimacy to the Government's claim that cuts are necessary for the "good of the nation". It is a weakness that is echoed in the ACTU bureaucracy's feeble resistance to the new industrial relations laws.

Industrial Relations

It was clear before the election that a Coalition victory would spell trouble on the industrial relations front. Sure enough, changes to Industrial Relations legislation, probably the most important issue on the Coalition agenda, was not long in coming. Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith introduced the 'Workplace Relations and other legislation Bill' to parliament on May 23.

The Bill has been referred to a special Senate Committee until late August, but this should not be cause for complacency. It represents nothing less than a full-scale ruling class attack on the principle of collective bargaining and the right of workers to be in a union of their own choosing.

Amongst other things, the Bill outlaws all forms of compulsory unionism; strips back all awards to 18 core conditions; removes many employment contracts from the scrutiny of the IRC, and with it what little protection this had offered workers in the past; reintroduces union-busting secondary boycotting legislation while removing existing Unfair Dismissal laws; restricts union access to work sites and gives employers a veto over the unions that their employees can join.

Furthermore, new confidentiality requirements will undermine the ability of unions to intervene to protect workers who have been pressured to accept individual contracts. As a result, the potential for employers to compel workers to trade away conditions like sick-leave and safety requirements will be greatly enhanced under the new laws.

The legislation provides employers with a weapon to attack pay and conditions, while at the same time undermining the ability of workers to effectively defend themselves. Although there has been widespread worker anger over the new laws, the response of union leaders has so far been insipid. ACTU president Jennie George has threatened High Court action, while appealing to employers not to introduce the Coalition's system of individual contracts. Secretary Bill Kelty can only affirm that changes are necessary "to create wealth for the nation", although he would have preferred them to have been brought in "a little slower". With trade union leaders like these, who needs conservative ministers like Costello and Reith to achieve ruling class aims and objectives?

Indigenous Land Rights

In keeping with the racist outbursts by many conservative MPs before the election, and to divert attention from the cuts outlined above, the Coalition has begun a racist campaign against Aboriginals and immigrants. They have made moves to abolish what they consider to be "unfair restrictions" on mining companies and pastoralists, by proposing changes to the Native Title Act.

The amendments to the Act consist of formal removal of the right of Aboriginals to claim ownership over land leased for pastoral purposes. The changes would make it harder for people to lodge native title claims, while at the same time making it easier for pastoralists and mining companies to exploit natural resources without the necessity of prior negotiation with Aboriginals.

Not surprisingly, Howard's proposed changes have been publicly supported by the major mining companies like CRA. The legislative changes have been defeated by Howard and his business counterparts as making the Act 'more workable' and as 'providing greater security for non-Aboriginal land users'. In a clear statement as to where his government's allegiances lie, Howard stated: "The former Government's [Mabo] legislation went too far; it created barriers to development that should not have been created, introduced procedural hurdles that should not have been put there, and those barriers and those changes have slowed development in the country and imposed unreasonable costs on miners and pastoralists."

This attack has been accompanied by the scapegoating of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and a clampdown on immigration quotas. Both represent glaring examples of the government's willingness to play the racist card to help divert attention away from the consequences of its policies in other areas. This racism must be denounced by all class conscious workers who should make it part of their own struggle to fight for aboriginal land rights and open borders for immigrants.

Gun Laws

No general assessment of the Coalition's first four months in office would be complete without some mention of the fiasco around gun law reform. With the tragic shooting of 35 people at Port Arthur on April 29, Howard saw an opportunity to demonstrate strong leadership and to divert attention from other aspects of his government's policies.

He responded immediately by pledging to impose a national ban on automatic and semi-automatic weapons, and to establish a national gun registry. On May 14, the Cabinet announced its plan to fund the compensation scheme for confiscated guns through an increase in the Medicare levy.

Although receiving widespread support in the bourgeois media, who have presented all opponents to the gun laws as far-right fanatical crazies, the issue has not been without its headaches for Howard and the Coalition. However popular the "tough stance" on gun control might be with many, it has also generated an unprecedented reaction from the pro-gun lobby which has serious implications for the Coalition - especially the National Party.

The loudest protest to the new gun laws comes from rural and farming communities which make up the majority of the National Party's constituency. Resistance to the proposed gun laws saw as many as 70,000 demonstrators protest in Melbourne on June 1. Many of these protesters who until recently have supported National have begun to desert the party. Moreover, some National backbenchers have broken party discipline and spoken out against the changes.

To compound National's problems, a new political party, "Australian First", has been formed by sacked ALP Kalgoorlie MP Graham Campbell, and is seeking to occupy the political space traditionally occupied by the Coalition's junior partner.

This could well split the National Party and end the Coalition, with "moderates" fusing with the Liberals and right-wingers joining the new Party.

Whatever the consequences of the new gun laws for conservative politics over the coming months, revolutionaries must be clear on one thing: the gun laws represent a strengthening of the capitalist state's monopoly on violence and must be unequivocally opposed.

The Future

The Coalitions primary concern in the first three months of power has been to position themselves favourably in order to carry out the next stage of the capitalist restructuring initiated by the former Labor government. They want to do so without the barriers that unions and a collectively organised labour force, would pose.

It is clear from the last four months that we can expect things to get a lot worse.

Only a mobilised and militant working class, prepared in the final instance to withdraw their labour power and strike en masse to defeat these attacks.

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WORKERS POWER, PO BOX 4, ARMADALE NORTH, VICTORIA 3143

Education in Crisis

The Howard government's cuts to education will have far reaching effects. Here we survey the proposals and the consequences for workers and students in the Higher Education sector.

The Federal Government's intentions to slash between 6 and 12% from the education budget amounts to a declaration of war on students and education workers. It follows hard on the heels of the Victorian Liberal Government's attacks on student unions through the "Voluntary Student Unionism" (VSU) legislation.

These attacks pose a serious threat to students and workers in the higher education sector but also offer the potential for mobilising a united fight back.

We are at a critical stage in the fight against education attacks, one which could see the logical conclusion of policies introduced by the ALP - a fully corporatised, user-pays higher education system geared to meeting the needs of industry.



Cuts

The Federal Coalition is expected to make massive cuts to the education sector. Up to $1.8 billion is set to be cut from the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, with cuts of at least $600 million from Higher Education and $400 million from employment programs.

For students this could mean significant changes to Higher Education Contribution Scheme(HECS) including a 30% increase with a lower repayment threshold and a higher rate of repayment. A variable HECS rate with three levels from expensive degrees such as medicine to low-cost courses such as arts could also be introduced. This would mean that HECS could vary from $3,400 to $6000 depending on the degree.

In addition, all postgraduates could be facing fees if this is extended to higher degrees done by course work. Fees for postgraduates already average $6,800, with the number of fee-paying students under the existing system expected to increase by 47% in the next three years.

Austudy could be scrapped and replaced with a loans scheme. Saving the government $1.56 Billion, this could affect up to 469,00 full time tertiary and secondary students. The existing Austudy supplement, which is in effect a loan in replacement for a portion of the Austudy grant, has only been taken out by 18.8% of eligible students since its introduction in 1993. This indicates high awareness of the debt implications amongst students.

The changes to HECS and Austudy would have drastic implications for students. If HECS was increased by 30% and Austudy scrapped then a fulltime student doing a three year degree could face a debt of $29,596.80. This could rise to $39,462.40 for four years and $49,328 for five years. A survey of 542 students at RMIT found that 76% of students would reconsider remaining at university if these changes occurred, while 48% would be affected by the scrapping of Austudy. Homeless students would be hardest hit. An estimated 11,000 secondary students are homeless in Australia, while between 25,000 and 30,000 students are expected to face homelessness some time during the academic year. In 1994, 16,000 students were receiving Austudy at the homeless rate. Victorians were one third this number with women outnumbering men two to one. For these students Austudy is their only means of surviving, let alone studying.

$1.8 billion is set to be cut from the department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs with cuts of at least $600 million from Higher Education and $400 million from employment programs.

While it is the already disadvantaged students who are likely to suffer most, the Higher Education Council has found that "male, economically well off students" are likely to benefit most from the extension of fee paying courses. On top of this the number of government funded university places could decrease. Even with 5% in cuts up to 21,000 student places could be lost.

Staff

Staff will also be affected. Up to 8000 jobs could be lost, as well as faculties, departments and even small universities being closed. Underfunding, overcrowding and inadequate resources will be the result while even more students could miss out on places at University.

All of this opens the way for up front fees for all. At the same time as the Coalition refuses to rule out up-front fees, Vice-Chancellors faced with massive cuts are pushing for undergraduate fees to make up for the loss of funding.

In TAFEs, funding for some labour market training programs has been frozen. At the same time apprentices and other workers on training programs face the prospect of not getting paid while in training, effectively meaning a 20% reduction in wages.

Whatever the changes, it is clear that new students entering the system will be affected, even if existing students are given a reprieve, as the Coalition promised before the election. The most likely cuts will be a mix of the user-pays measures mentioned above, and gradual but smaller funding cuts, such as operating grants cut to a total of $500 million over four years.

Closely related to the budget cuts is the continuing trend to corporatise universities.. This means that universities, along with other publicly-owned and funded bodies like Telstra, operate like businesses. Changes in higher education could see an increase in private universities and corporate arms of government-funded universities. If government funds are diverted to private universities, in the context of corporatisation of existing universities, the distinction between them will become blurred.

Finally, the national introduction of VSU is a distinct possibility. If this happens, the government's ability to peddle the above cuts will be greatly enhanced. We must prepare to fight these attacks now.

Responses

The extent of the proposed cuts has, not surprisingly, drawn response from all quarters of government, industry and the education sector.

The Vice-Chancellors and the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) originally came out with a vocal and united front against the cuts. The press was full of the dire predictions from the vice-chancellors who continually voiced their commitment to opposing the cuts. However, this situation was not to last long.

Turnaround

Individual Vice-Chancellors began lobbying the Education Minister, Senator Vanstone. Then on the eve of a national staff and student strike, and only days after a so-called alliance between the National Union of Students, university staff and vice-chancellors was announced, the AVCC declared it was ready to work co-operatively with the government.

It should be remembered that the AVCC had been supportive of the ALP's changes to higher education, including the introduction of HECS, the corporitisation and partial deregulation of higher education, and the expansion of export education. The AVCC has also advocated fees for over-quota students. In fact, one of the key arguments used by Vice-Chancellors against budget cuts is that it would damage the billion dollar export education industry.

Not long after the AVCC announcement, the so-called "group of eight" (GO8) big universities began their own representations to the Minister. Victorian Vice-Chancellors, with support of the state Liberal Minster for Higher Education, Phil Honeywood, came out in support of a 30% HECS increase combined with tuition fees and scholarships.

NTEU

Meanwhile general staff and academics through the National Tertiary Education Industrial Union(NTEU) began their own action against budget cuts and in defence of the fight for a long overdue pay rise for academic staff. A strike on May 30 of students and staff saw the closure of over ninety percent of classes at universities across Australia. Whilst this strike showed in a small way what is possible if students and staff work together, it was also clear that union officials were not prepared to enforce the strike and shut down the university. For example, at La Trobe the NTEU had an exemptions list which included workers on the CRA research park. The NTEU in addition was giving weight to the AVCC's concerns about the damage to the education sector as an industry and, in particular, export education. Overall, the NTEU has shown itself to be quite conservative and may very well capitulate to VC and government pressures to negotiate cuts, including fees in return for jobs and pay rises.

NUS

At the same time, the National Union of Students was attempting to unify staff and VCs into a higher education alliance which didn't last very long. NUS has been very careful to court the NTEU, while ignoring the other unions on campus whose support would be necessary to really shut down the universities.

Rather than attempting to mobilise a genuine campaign on the ground against budget cuts, NUS has opted for a more public pressure style campaign, hence its concentration on politicians, union bureaucrats and vice-chancellors.

The Victorian left activists' response to the cuts has followed the pattern of mobilisation then confusion that has characterised the education campaign since the introduction of HECS. Yet for the student movement the next few years will be a critical period. Budget cuts offer the greatest opportunity for mobilisations in a long time but the crisis of leadership in the movement threatens students' ability to fight back. The source of this crisis lies in a lack of understanding of the nature of the attacks and what is necessary to beat them.



Not to be trusted : VC Beanland in a news conference with Ministers Vanstone and Honeywood after reaching an "amicable" agreement on Higher Education.

Student Struggle
The time to fight is now

The current campaign against VSU is a perfect example of the disorientation of the student movement. This campaign is being pulled between populism on the part of the DSP, who at a crucial stage in the campaign are calling for broad-based mass rallies similar to the 1994 campaign; misdirected militancy of the ISO and SA who seem to think that any form of direct action is necessary, however indiscriminate or misdirected, if the campaign is to be saved; and bureaucratic restructuring measures from student union officials who believe that simply getting money out of administrations so that student unions can keep going is all that is needed.

In this context the education cuts have provided new direction in the face of a failing VSU campaign.

The crisis in the campaign is evident in the Student Unionism Network (SUN) with the ISO and SA effectively forming a pro-militancy block, and the DSP and Militant constituting a mass action/slow build block. Both sides have falsely counterposed important elements of the campaign while forgetting that the key is building a conscious layer of committed student unionists for the express purpose of making the legislation unworkable and transforming the existing student organisations into genuine fighting unions.

What are we fighting for?

Unless we are clear on the answer to this question we are in danger of repeating past mistakes.

We should oppose VSU not simply because student organisations are under attack, or because we will no longer be able to continue as we have. The crucial aspect about VSU is that it seeks to atomise and individualise students. This means attacking our capacity to independently and collectively organise.

We are fighting for exactly those aspects of student organisations that offer the capacity for students to collectively organise. Fighting VSU means fighting to transform our existing student organisations into real fighting unions with democratic control by the membership. These have to be organisations where in place of the amenities/services fee the only fee levied is a union due set and controlled by students. We must also be laying the foundations for rank and file students to be able to continue to organise no matter what happens.

Fighting VSU also means defending the concept of universal membership. What we have referred to as union membership; the closed shop. This means that everyone on the work site must be a union member. This is an important principle because it disallows the divide-and-rule tactic employed both by bosses and the university administrations. The question is how we get this closed shop. The closed shop shouldn't be the result of agreements between unions and bosses/administrations which can tie the union leadership's interests to those of the bosses/administrations.

The aim of the VSU campaign cannot be simply based around the demand "Repeal VSU". Firstly such a demand implies that all we are fighting for is a return to the situation which existed before the legislation. Student unions originally arose not in conflict but in co-operation with university administrations. Universities recognised the advantage of having students manage particular services and functions which the university would otherwise find it difficult to provide. Student unions relied on the university to collect their funds. Student unions served the function of mediating between their membership and the university administrations.

DEET Money

The recent loss of DEET funding has raised the question of how Student Unions should be funded. This has led to several responses: 1) calling on the administrations to hand over student money with no strings attached; 2) institutionalising 'creative' accounting of student union budgets to allow for the maximum funding available under the legislation; 3) boycotting the GSF and collecting voluntary fees; 4) fundraising.

As long as compulsory non-academic fees exist, students must be mobilising and fighting to either gain control of the fee or to abolish it, before any moves towards voluntary collection of fees are considered. This means that 'creative' accounting can only ever be a tactical measure - to institutionalise it does nothing to actually win student control of student affairs. Similarly, students must fight to get their student newspapers funded from student money with no strings attached.

VSU and budget cuts must be linked at every step of the campaign. Students must link up with campus workers, unions, the unemployed and secondary school students at every opportunity. However, students must reject any united fronts with the vice-chancellors.

Where to now?

VSU and budget cuts must be linked at every stage of the campaign. Students must link up with campus workers, unions, the unemployed and secondary school students. However, students must reject any united fronts with the vice-chancellors. They are effectively the bosses of the university and will be the ones implementing VSU and budget cuts. The orientation must always be to the rank & file and to building organised rank & file resistance to government attacks.

In the VSU campaign we should be fighting to defeat VSU by making it unworkable at a campus level, and by linking up with other attacks on unions and the community. We need to build a mass base of support on campuses for student unionism as expressed through rank and file anti-VSU groups and class delegate/contact structures. Democratic, fighting and independent student unions directed by, accountable to and recallable by students through delegates and collectives with General Student Meetings as the peak decision-making body, should be the aim of the campaign.

The campaign should demand the handing over of student money to student unions with no strings attached and at a level determined by students. A key demand is the dropping of all charges on student activists and the cessation of any further arrests. We must demand that universities oppose VSU, support universal membership and support student control of student affairs. The campaign should oppose the alteration of student union constitutions in any way which may reflect the implementation of VSU. This includes the imposition of conditions on student unions which furthers the implementation of VSU, including funding agreements. It is necessary to oppose the break-up of student unions as a result of VSU, or the transformation of student unions into service-only providers. There should be no negotiations with administration or any decisions that fundamentally affect students and the campaign without the consent of the student body via General Student Meetings.

This must be linked to the fight against budget cuts and for free and accessible education controlled by students and workers. This means fighting to retain and extend Austudy. It also means defending existing benefits such as rent assistance and concessions for Austudy, and fighting to extend these benefits to all students. Students must fight alongside the unemployed and other social security recipients to demand a minimum living wage, and alongside squatters and homeless action groups for fair rents and decent housing. Fighting the cuts means linking up with workers on campus and high school students and involving them in the campaign.

On campuses we need to build student unionism fighting groups and a class delegate structure. This can only be done by taking the fight to students through daily stalls and "lecture bashing". A list of all those students ready to act as class contacts must be set up immediately as a start towards the class delegate system. Student unions must set up a fighting fund to support the fight against VSU and budget cuts. Links must be made with all unions on campus and meetings of students and workers must be organised to discuss joint action. The aim must be to disrupt the university and shut it down if necessary.



SUN

At a cross-campus level SUN must be revitalised. SUN should be a forum for the people who are doing the day-to-day work on the campuses. However, any person or group wanting to fight VSU and budget cuts should be welcome in SUN. Unions should be encouraged to send members along to SUN meetings. SUN should attempt to make links with all the campuses but not have any pretensions about being the representative body for all the campuses. All campuses should be encouraged to have active groups and SUN should help this to occur.

SUN should coordinate the campaign in consultation with campus groups and should be a forum for discussing the politics of the campaign. A working group must be set up to build the network via publicity and campus visits. Important decisions must be put on notice so that campus groups can give their input on the decision. SUN should be prepared to conduct meetings on remote campuses from time to time. Finally, any debate about reforming SUN should use as its starting point the question of what kind of organisation is needed to defeat VSU and fight cuts. SUN should organise visits to high schools and make contact with unions and other groups affected by budget cuts. Joint cross-sectoral demonstrations should be organised.

The campaign must be prepared to use militant tactics, tactics which strike at the heart of the enemy. For students this should include not just occupations but student strikes, pickets and other forms of disruption. The campaign against VSU and budget cuts must strike at the point where these measures are to be implemented - the campuses. Campus actions should be backed up by centralised demonstrations. These give a public profile to the demonstrations, reinforce the point that the struggle is a cross campus one and give a focus for smaller campuses. Campus workers should be encouraged to take part. Student unions should call a strike or stopwork of students before each demonstration and encourage campus unions to do likewise.

Police repression in Victoria has increased and the state will not hesitate in squashing dissent to coalition policies by force. For this reason the campaign must be organised. At every action there should be an action/coordinating committee responsible for developing tactics, putting proposals to the crowd, directing the marshals and ensuring adequate preparation to defend the objectives of the rally. Marshals should be elected and be prepared to work to the objectives of the action, including leading militancy whilst ensuring the defence of demonstrators.

Workers & Students : Unite to Fight

It has been shown as recently as December 1995 in France, that it is only through a united fightback of workers, students and the unemployed, using class struggle methods, that the government can be forced to retreat.

Workers and students have to show the government and its capitalist backers, that it cannot wage a war of austerity cuts without getting a serious fight on its hands.

Coalition attacks Indigenous rights

With the Coalition in power, attacks on indigenous rights have intensified. The Howard Government wasted little time in declaring their intention to "reform" Aboriginal affairs. Changes have been proposed to both the Native Title Act and to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission (ATSIC). Yet indigenous peoples and those who support their struggle for land rights, know the true agenda behind the Government's "reforms": the further destruction of the piecemeal gains that have been won over the years.

Native Title Act

Despite being the original inhabitants of the Australian continent, numerous obstacles and limitations confront indigenous people attempting to establish the "legitimacy" of their land claims. First, they must demonstrate that they have occupied the land since British settlement and that occupation is based on traditional customs and laws. Secondly, it has to be established that Native Title has survived. Incredibly, Native Title is legally judged to be lost when people lose connection with the land, even if this occurs through forcible removal or death. Native Title may also be extinguished through government appropriations for public uses such as roads, railways, or public buildings. With respect to land leased out by the Crown the case is less clear. However, even where Crown leases do not extinguish Native Title, they nevertheless restrict it. Also, while the authority to prospect for minerals may not extinguish Native Title, a mining lease might. And even if Native Title was extended to minerals, statutes reserving those minerals for the Crown may ultimately extinguish Native Title.

Despite these obstacles and limitations, the Howard Government insists that the Native Title Act still needs to be made more "workable". What is clear is that the Government is not concerned to make the Native Title Act more effective for indigenous people. On the contrary, the Coalition's real intention is to make the legislation more amenable to business interests.

Specifically, the Coalition wants to amend the Native Title Act to eliminate the right of indigenous claimants to negotiate and claim on land leased for mining exploration or for pastoral purposes.

The Coalition proposals will make it even more difficult for indigenous groups to lodge Native Title claims, while providing greater flexibility for miners and pastoralists to develop land, especially where the government judges doing so to be in the "national interest".

It is certainly not surprising that the Coalition's proposed changes to the Native Title Act have won the support of major mining companies like Century Zinc and CRA. Ever since the ruling on the Mabo case in June 1992, which acknowledged Native Title in favour of the Merriam people of the Murray Islands, the mining lobbies and their allies in state governments have been aware of the potential threat to their profit-making aspirations that Native Title presents. In one clear post-Mabo expression of their hostility to Native Title claims, mining giant CRA threatened to withdraw $1.74 billion in investment from the Gulf Peninsula unless the Government legislated to protect mining interests. Indeed, Howard and Herron have gone to great lengths to placate business and farming uncertainty and fear of Native Title, and the proposed amendments to the Act are simply the crystallisation of this.

ATSIC

In addition to amending Native Title Legislation, the Coalition is also targeting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Allegations of impropriety within ATSIC has led the Minster for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Herron, to call for Federal Police investigations.

These investigations have been the pretext for moves to "restructure" ATSIC and make it more "accountable". Although ATSIC is already under stricter accountability measures than other government departments, the Coalition wants to appoint a "special auditor" to look at possible fraud and mismanagement. If the impropriety claims are verified the Coalition wants to appoint an administrator to oversee ATSIC. Their moves to curb "corruption" in ATSIC play into racist beliefs that Aboriginal people get too many "handouts" which they use unwisely.

Coalition vs Indigenous peoples

The various incentives of the government in relation to the Native Title Act and ATSIC constitute a clear attack on the right of indigenous peoples, both to their land and to autonomous organisations. The real thrust of these amendments to Native Title legislation and the restructuring of ATSIC is to pander to the interests of powerful farmers and mining lobbies whilst undermining the rights of indigenous people and the autonomy of their organisations.

It is little wonder, therefore, that at least some sections of the Aboriginal community are aware that the "negotiation" and "restructuring" process means getting sold out, and are questioning whether anything much has changed since the first invasion and appropriation of their land by colonialists.

•Down with racist witch hunts
•Defend Aboriginal land rights
•Build a mass campaign against Coalition racism



The State and Gun Control

The massacre at Port Arthur on April 29 has been cynically manipulated by all bourgeois political parties. The Coalition, Labor, the Democrats and the Greens have all jumped on the "tougher gun laws" bandwagon, demonising any opposition as crazed ultra-right paranoia. In so doing they have obscured the real issues raised by the killings and similar tragic episodes.

After the events of late April, Howard was quick to seize the opportunity to divert attention away from his party's reactionary social and industrial policies. At the same time, the massacre allowed Howard to present himself as a strong but caring leader in a nation's darkest hour, while also providing him with a pretext for cracking down on gun ownership. And this he did.

At a national gun summit on May 23, the government and all state leaders agreed in principle to extensive gun law reforms. The legislation, supported by all of the major parties, outlaws automatic and semi-automatic weapons, establishes a national gun registry, and in its final form may even insist on psychiatric testing for prospective gun owners.

The response from the pro-gun lobby has been unprecedented. There have been protest rallies in all of the main centres, attracting more than 70,000 in Melbourne on June 1 and 35,000 in Sydney on June 15. Similarly, dozens of smaller rallies and meetings in rural towns throughout the country have expressed not only a strong resistance to the gun laws, but a powerful under-current of discontent with Canberra politics and the major parties.

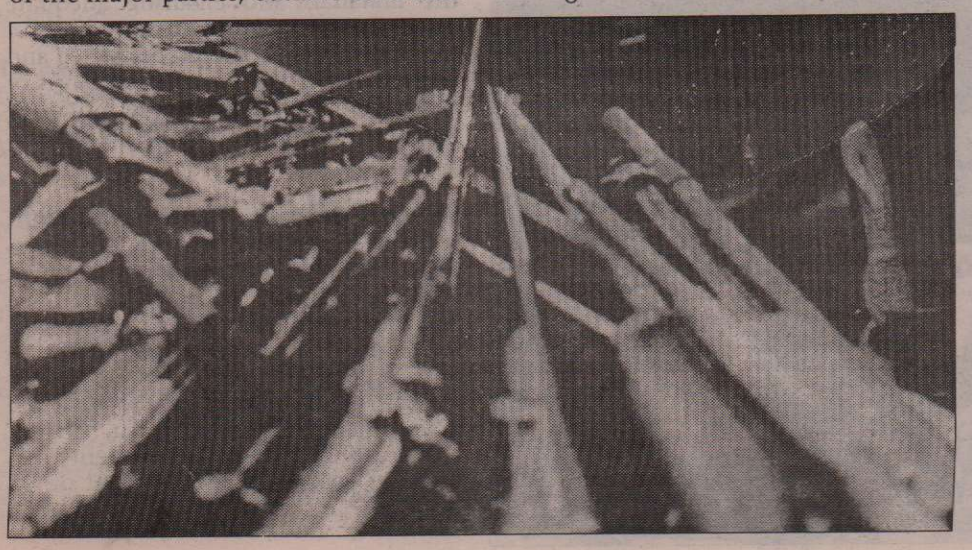
Repercussions

There have been several political repercussions of the new stance on gun laws. To begin with, resistance to the gun laws has caused problems for the Coalition's partner, the National Party. Many of that Party's traditional supporters are amongst those most vehemently opposed to Howard's gun laws and the arrogant, autocratic way they have been imposed. Members and supporters of the party have begun to leave in droves.

This has altered the face of conservative politics, and may well lead to a split in the National Party between "moderates" who join the Liberals, disaffected right-wingers who leave to join new conservative formations, and die-hard National supporters.

The opposition to gun control has been exploited and manipulated by right-wing demagogues. Racist ex-Labor Party MP Graham Campbell, backed by Australians Against Further Immigration, has formed a new populist party called "Australia First". Clearly symbiotic with Winston Peters' "New Zealand First" party across the Tasman, the new formation's main selling points are a putrid mixture of anti-immigrant hatred, anglo-Australian xenophobia and chauvinism of various shades.

This has given the bourgeois press extra ammunition for painting all those who oppose the gun laws as far-right extremists living in a conspiracy-ridden fairy land. Fearful of being associated with the red-neck brigade, many left-wingers and class-conscious workers have drawn the dangerous conclusion that the new gun laws should be supported. This is a mistake. It implies that the capitalist state is a benevolent institution that can be entrusted with the task of protecting the whole population.



Marxism and the State

As Marx said, the capitalist state is an instrument for the oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. This oppression rests on the power of what Engels referred to as "armed bodies of men". These armed bodies have a monopoly on the lawful use of violence within a given territory, and use it whenever bourgeois laws are transgressed or the capitalist order is threatened.

Any strengthening of this state monopoly of the means of violence must be resolutely opposed by genuine revolutionaries.

The imposition of new gun laws strengthens this monopoly at precisely the time when state violence is increasing. Police shootings, deaths in custody, crackdowns on dissident student activists and the implementation of vicious anti-labour laws, all signal a rise in state repression.

Support for gun laws, even when motivated by the most well-meaning intentions, amounts to support for strengthening the state's monopoly on violence. Furthermore, it diverts attention away from the real causes of violence in society, which have nothing to do with the availability of guns.

Rather, massacres such as the one at Port Arthur and the countless other acts of violence committed daily, are symptoms of an anarchic conflict-ridden system that breeds alienation and violence.

The hype surrounding the new gun laws conceals this, while reinforcing state violence.

In the final instance this violence will be wielded against the working class and in the defence of capitalism and private property.

Support for the new gun laws, along with utopian calls such as Militant's "democratise the police force", violate this fundamental Marxist insight.

Therefore, all consistent revolutionaries and class-conscious workers must stand firmly against the new gun laws.

Lesbian & Gay Oppression:
A Class Question

The Tasmanian Parliament looks set to abolish laws which make sexual intercourse between consenting adult males an offence. Gay and lesbian activists in Tasmania have been fighting to have this law abolished for many years.

Finally it looks as though there may be victory in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights. But we have to recognise that a law change is not enough - gays and lesbians cannot achieve freedom from persecution while capitalism remains. Whether or not Tasmania legalises homosexual acts, discrimination, oppression, legal harassment, and physical assaults will continue. At work lesbians and gay men face the constant threat of victimisation and dismissal. In addition, they suffer routine harassment by the cops on the streets, in the gay clubs, and by the targeting of beats and so on. Separated or divorsed lesbian and gay parents are systematically denied custody of and access to their children.



The origins and nature of oppression

Homosexual acts have long been condemned by some religions, but the systematic oppression of homosexuals as a distinct category of people separated off from "normal" society began only about two hundred years ago. It is a feature of capitalist society.

The justification for this oppression is that homosexuality is not merely abnormal but also, and more importantly, "unnatural". While the levels of tolerance that capitalist society is prepared to grant homosexuality have fluctuated, acceptance and recognition of homosexuality as a natural phenomenon, has never existed. Yet the sexual behaviour deemed "natural" by capitalist society - heterosexual activity with great emphasis on penetrative intercourse as "real" sex - is only one aspect of human sexuality. What makes it so suited to being described as the only natural form of human sexuality is its reproductive function.

To understand lesbian and gay oppression it is necessary to dispense with capitalism's categories of natural and unnatural. They are arbitrary in the extreme.

In the thousands of years preceding capitalism's rise to world dominance there were many different views of what was natural and unnatural in sexual relations. The wide diversity of moral codes throughout history is eloquent testimony to the relativity of the term natural. Attitudes towards sexual behaviour and moral codes change as a particular society changes. Moral codes for regulating sexuality are determined by the needs of the class that rules. The condemnation of homosexuality as unnatural and the systematic oppression of homosexuals arose from the needs of capitalist society.

The triumph of capitalism over feudalism in the economic and political spheres was reflected in changes in philosophy and morality. The "natural order" of late feudalism was preserved but was proven to be in accord with the precepts of reason and empirical fact. An important element was the newly emerging bourgeois family, and all manifestations of sexuality that did not accord with this were held to be deviations from nature and from reason.

As social relations began to be moulded by the needs of an economy geared towards production for exchange, the market, and money, an intensification of the sexual division of labour took place. There was growing separation of home and work. The old feudal household as a unit of production was being broken up. Changes in the organisation of work affected the legal and social position of women and also the dominant ideas about the roles of women and men.

The empirical philosophy of John Locke, writing in the 1690's, gained popularity in Britain. He said private property was a basic "natural right" for men. The bourgeois man should be "free" to accumulate capital through his own hard work and the use of his workers' labour. In particular, he needed to be free from domestic tasks. This greatly affected views of marriage.

The rising bourgeoisie celebrated the ideal of the individual love match, that marriage should be the result of a man's love for a woman. The bourgeois family was private and domestic. It was not a unit of production, but a social structure which freed the male to accumulate capital and establish influence in society.

The result was that sexual relationships outside the heterosexual love match were increasingly viewed as a threat to the bourgeois family itself. Homosexuality in particular became an offence not simply against nature but also against the "natural" bourgeois family. It came to be viewed as the activity of a distinct minority who were choosing to commit crimes against the natural order of the world.

> **The condemnation of homosexuality as unnatural and the systematic oppression of homosexuals arose from the needs of capitalist society**

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie consolidated itself as the ruling class. It brought into existence the industrial working class and eventually the conditions necessary for the revolutionary transformation of society - large scale industry.

Initially the bourgeoisie did not seek to impose its "ideal' family on the working class. On the contray, the requirements of capital accumulation in the early nineteenth century led it to ruthlessly break up proletarian families.

Child labour, the horrific exploitation of women workers and the exacting toll of long hours on male workers undermined the reproduction of a stable family life. Pressure from the working class for the protection of family (a progressive struggle), and the bourgeoisie's need to use the family as a means of regenerating and reproducing labour power, led to the spread of the bourgeois family as the bedrock social unit.

Imperialism

This process was accelerated towards the end of the nineteenth century. Capitalism had developed to its imperialist stage. This was accompanied by significant changes in the composition of the working class. A relatively better off layer of skilled male workers came to dominate politically. This was the social basis for the development of reformism. This "aristocracy of labour" was bought off by the fruits of imperialism's super-profits.

In this period the model of the bourgeois family was adopted by the working class. It fitted with the general response of skilled workers to the trade crisis (women out first) and to their trade union demands (the male "family wage" and the exclusion of women from productive labour especially in the skilled trades).

If the status of the bourgeois male was partly measured by the "leisure" of his wife and daughters in the eighteenth century, by the end of the nineteenth century a similar attitude prevailed amongst the upper layer of the working class. And it served as a powerful transmission-belt of bourgeois ideology to the rest of the class. The effect was that the working class became infected by the bourgeoisie's hostility to "unnatural acts". The next important step was the systemisation of these beliefs in laws making homosexuality a crime against decency.

Yet there was no legal crusade against lesbianism. This was because nineteenth century attitudes towards women were based on a total denial of women's sexuality. However, when lesbianism refused to go away, the state showed it was prepared to use laws such as indecent assault against lesbians.

By the beginning of the twentieth century most of imperialist Europe and North America had legally sanctioned the oppression of homosexuals. It took over sixty years for any generalised shift in attitude and law reform to occur. But the years of tolerance that followed the 1960's were of limited use and duration. Now even the reforms of the "permissive" 1960s are under attack, with gay men blamed for the AIDS virus, lesbians sacked from their jobs, denied their children and beaten up in the streets. Capitalism has given lesbian and gay oppression a legal, political and social form. It has made it more wide-ranging and thorough-going than ever before, but it has also sparked resistance. This resistance needs to be transformed into a struggle, not only against oppression but also against the capitalist society that nurtures and sustains that oppression.

Action programme

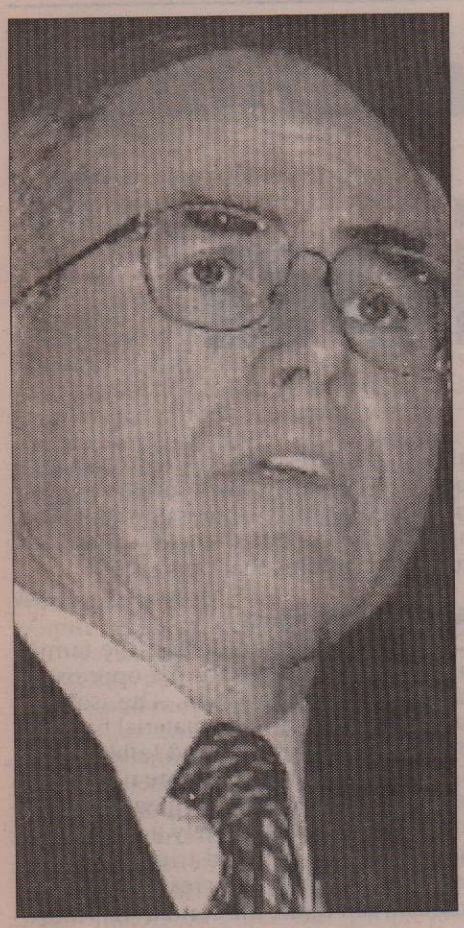
Capitalism's need to defend the family provides the impetus for the oppression of lesbians and gay men. The isolated family household is the material basis for the oppression of gays and lesbians. So, despite the fact that there are non-working class lesbians and gay men, the fight for liberation is ultimately a class question. Only the political triumph of the working class and the creation of communism can create the conditions whereby the family can be transcended.

Working class lesbians and gay men have a consistent interest in fighting for real sexual liberation. Middle or upper class lesbians and gay men can and have been won to struggles for democratic rights, for public tolerance and so on. Indeed the existence of gay men in the highest echelons of capitalist society has led to periods of limited tolerance. However, bourgeois and middle class lesbians and gay men can afford to cushion themselves. Being oppressed does not mean that lesbians and gays of the middle or bourgeois classes are likely to be radical. Their stake in bourgeois society is often an overriding factor. But working class lesbians and gays have a fundamental and irreconcilable class antagonism to the bourgeoisie.

We are against any attempt to blur class differences within a lesbian and gay organisation/movement. We encourage the clarification of such differences. Furthermore we oppose separatism. For this reason we oppose the call for an autonomous lesbian and gay movement, implying as it has come to do, autonomy from distinct politics, as well as from distinct parties.

Working class lesbians and gay men have a material interest in fighting the system that lays the basis for their oppression. Formal equality means nothing to a worker who does not have the material means to go through endless court cases fighting discrimination. Only the abolition of capitalism will create the material basis for the end of oppression, for a society in which sexual orientation is a matter for free choice. While communists fight for an end to all forms of discrimination, and while we defend all those attacked because of their sexual orientation, we do so on the basis of recognising that the lesbian and gay question is not separate from the class struggle. It is a class question requiring a socialist answer and a revolutionary communist party.

The task for lesbians and gay men is to organise to fight moral reaction. The increase in oppression as capitalism reaches crisis, shows that the working class is not merely the ally of gays and lesbians but the only force capable of successfully waging this fight. The fightback must be organised within the organisations of the working class, winning support for the struggle against oppression. At the same time, within the lesbian and gay "communities" support must be organised for the economic and political struggles of the working class. Lesbians and gay men must stand in the front ranks of the labour movement as militant class fighters and, at the same time, win that movement to a class fight for lesbian and gay liberation as part of the struggle for socialism.



Industrial relations under

Down with the

Unions and the new Bill

"The Liberal and National parties have the clear authority of the Australian people to implement practical industrial relations changes enunciated openly and often long before the election".

So said John Howard on 18 May. Five days later his industrial relations minister Peter Reith tabled the new industrial relations changes in Parliament.

Senate

Democrat and Labor ministers in the Senate immediately moved to have the new legislation deferred to a special Senate committee until late August.

This was not because they oppose in principle the Coalition's rationale that industrial relations reform is a burning necessity for Australian capitalism.

It was because even these hardened right-wingers were shaken by the scale of the changes and worried about the consequences for political stability.

Agenda

The agenda behind the "Workplace Relations and other Legislation Bill" is to destroy the award system and replace collective bargaining with individual contracts.

It is a Coalition strategy for revitalising Australian capitalism by making workers pay for capitalist crisis.

This will be achieved by making them produce more for less, and by destroying their existing conditions and collective fighting capacities.

It is a capitalist strategy which must be clearly understood, firmly rejected and actively resisted every step of the way.

When measured against the historically very low levels of strike action in recent years, the months since the election of the Coalition have certainly seen something of an up-turn in worker struggle. In Victoria there have been lengthy disputes involving Melbourne Nestle workers, wool scourers and Shell employees in Geelong, and Health and Community Service Union workers throughout the state.

In addition, there have been strikes and stopwork meetings involving nurses, construction workers, wharfies and tertiary education workers. In May, public sector workers throughout the country expressed their anger at government plans to slash up to 20,000 of their jobs, while 80,000 NSW teachers also struck.

In different ways and to differing degrees, all of these disputes have something in common: the position of workers has been undermined by the union bureaucracy.

In the case of workers at the E.P. Robinson wool scouring plant in Geelong, this occurred when the Australian Workers Union (AWU) sent scab labour into the plant to undermine the picket of sacked workers who had joined a rival union - the Shearers and Rural Workers Union (SRWU). Not only did they send in scab labour, they collaborated with management to bolster the police presence.

In an affidavit, the managing director of E.P. Robinson stated that an AWU organiser had contacted him, asking him for stronger police presence at the picket site. Needless to say, the manager assured the union organiser that his request would be passed on.

The workers at Nestle's Campbellfield plant in Melbourne who were locked out for seven weeks over March, April and May, were similarly betrayed by union officials, only this time it was "their own" union officials. On 8 May, under pressure from both Nestle's management and union leaders, workers reluctantly voted to accept a company offer.

In return for a miserly 2% wage adjustment, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) bureaucracy agreed to 200 redundancies plus an across-the-board 25% productivity increase to be achieved within three months. Furthermore, a 15% early shift allowance will be removed, and workers will be forced to take on tasks previously done by others. An article in the AMWU's magazine suggested that this represents some sort of victory for workers. It claims that this outcome, "while not perfect for Campbellfield workers, represented a heavy defeat for the company"! This is nothing less than an alibi for their own treachery and incompetence over the course of the dispute.

While union bureaucracy duplicity has not been as blatant in other disputes, in all the instances referred to above workers have been restrained from extending militant action, by their so-called leaders.

This is not because of the individual failings or personal deceitfulness of those [mis]leaders, but because of: 1) the different interests of the bureaucrats and the workers; 2) the limitations of a purely trade unionist outlook on the relation-

Workplace Relations Bill: What is it?



The new Bill outlaws any form of compulsory unionism and scraps all references to international conventions. These include freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain. It has several core elements which, taken together, represent a grave threat to the working class.

A key element of the new Bill relates to awards. For workers who are able to avoid the imposition of individual contracts, awards will be stripped back to a set of 18 minimum conditions. These include: two weeks sick leave, four weeks annual leave, minimum pay rates and hours of work and unpaid parental leave and jury service.

Many other conditions presently embodied in awards will likewise be threatened. To name but a few, we can safely anticipate that rostered days off, travel allowances, protective clothing, tools and amenities allowances, meal and rest breaks and redundancy pay will be a thing of the past for many workers.

Australian Workplace Agreements

The Coalition's main mechanism for achieving these changes to conditions will be Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). AWAs can be either collective or individual contracts between workers and bosses.

However, because workers sign individually and are precluded from taking strike action once they have entered into an AWA, they are for all intents and purposes individual contracts.

Even if an enterprise agreement already exists, employers can sign individual contracts with workers which over-ride the collective agreement. What's more, these will no longer be subject to scrutiny by the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC).

This removes what little protection of minimum work standards that this forum has offered. And in the reduced number of cases that the IRC can arbitrate, they will be compelled by law to take into account considerations of higher productivity, low inflation, international competitiveness and so-called "restrictive work practices".

As a result, the only avenue for many workers to air their grievances will be to take their employers to court.

The onus will be on them to prove that the minimum work conditions of the Bill have been violated. They will also have to personally foot the legal bills. Both of these factors will be a tremendous disincentive for workers to stand up to their bosses in the new industrial relations climate.

Unions

Also included is new legislation barring unions from entering a workplace during work hours.

Unions will need a written invitation by at least two workers to enter outside work hours, and in order to represent workers in enterprise agreements, unions will have to have the written invitation of at least 50% of the workers at a workplace.

But under insidious confidentiality clauses, they will not be able to scrutinise the work agreements of non-union members.

Nor will they have any rights of access to companies' wage records. These are hardly measures that add up to a "fair go all round", as Howard would have us believe.

Most incredibly, employers will be able to veto workers' choice of unions. Reith claims that this doesn't mean that the Coalition is "proposing some bias in the system against unions which are properly representing their members".

The problem for workers is that under the new veto laws it will be their bosses who determine who is "properly" representing their interests!

It is obvious from this that in addition to pushing individual contracts, the whole tenor of the act is to promote tame company unions.

This is fully confirmed by the Bill's provisions for "workplace unions". The membership of these unions can be as little as 20 but no larger than 100. Clearly a "union" of 20, or even one hundred, will face imposing restrictions on their ability to "properly represent their members".

For one thing the resources of such tiny collectives are going to be so minuscule that they will greatly restrict the scope of the union's operations.

Moreover, the fate of these unions will be so intimately tied to the fate of the company that they work within, that damaging compromises with bosses will be inevitable.

Strikes

In addition to this gross attack on the rights of workers, the Bill reintroduces the union-busting secondary boycotting provisions that were removed in 1992.

These provisions make it illegal for workers not directly engaged in a dispute to take solidarity action in support of fellow workers. Strike pay will also be outlawed.

The penalties for violating any of these provisions are draconian.

Individual workers can be fined up to $2,000, while rebellious trade unions face fines of $10,000 plus the payment of expenses to the affected company.

Finally, the Bill makes a wholesale revision of what Howard has described as "absurd, anti-job, unfair dismissal laws dumped on the Australian business community".

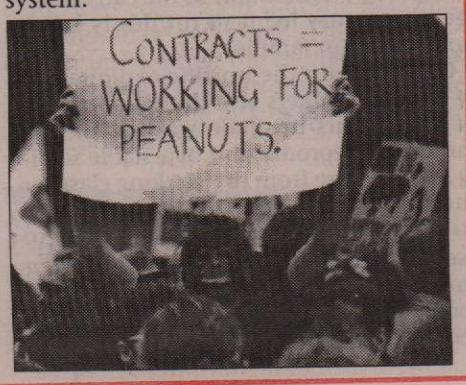
In essence the revision to these laws will mean that employers will be able to once again sack workers for no reason with almost total impunity - no doubt in the interests of a "fair go all round".

If the odd employer is caught out for unfair dismissal, they need not worry: Howard has put in a compensation cap of $30,000 regardless of tangible and intangible effects on the worker concerned.

Every element of the new Bill is viciously anti-worker and anti-union.

The new Bill is based on one implicit rationale: Australian capitalism must be more internationally competitive.

To be so capitalists and workers must be offered an incentive: the incentive for the capitalist is higher profit; the incentive for the worker is lower wages and the threat of unemployment, which are both stimuli to improving their productivity. Such is the logic of the capitalist system.



Howard Anti-Worker laws!

ship between capital and labour. Both of these factors have meant that the bureaucracy has accepted the rationale that increased productivity is in the interests of all Australians. This is pedalled as "realism" by the bureaucrats, and used to justify the most shameless class collaboration and betrayals of their membership.

For example, ACTU secretary Bill Kelty stated on BBC radio that although he "would have preferred a little slower reform", industrial relations changes to increase productivity are a necessity: "Australia has got to bite the bullet. Australia has got to be part of the rest of the world, it's got to be internationally competitive and we've got to do so sooner rather than later to create wealth for the nation".

This concern with productivity and international competitiveness is echoed by Maritime Union of Australia secretary John Coombs. Coombs seeks an accommodation with the ruling class, the Coalition and its anti-union laws, by promising increased productivity. He is quoted in the Financial Review of 5 June, as saying: "The fact is, what I have put in place to survive this government is whatever I can do to remove any suggestion that I cannot deliver on productivity." In other words, he has a preference for delivering productivity for the bourgeoisie rather than delivering on the defence of the rights and conditions of the workers who pay his wages.

ACTU President Jennie George carries this class collaborationist sentiment to its logical conclusion. Commenting on the ACTU's strategy for fighting the new laws, she stated that employers would be asked to "reassert their commitments to enterprise bargaining and to undertake not to introduce the Coalition system of individual contracts once the legislation is passed." This pious appeal to the very people who will benefit from the new legislation is indicative of the reformist perspective that seeks to reconcile the irreconcilable: the opposed interests of workers and the bosses whose very existence depends on exploiting them.

This utopian appeal is supplemented by a threat of "high court action" if the government does not remove some of the more noxious elements of the legislation. Again this shows that it is not the direction of the reforms that the bureaucrats are against, but only the scale and speed of their implementation.

Workers have been restrained from extending militant action by their so-called leaders.

All of these bureaucratic schemes are false strategies for workers, strategies that will only facilitate defeat. Workers need a fighting alternative to smash the Coalition's anti-worker laws and austerity drive.

In the first instance, this requires a rejection of the Kelty/George/Labor Party logic which says that "international competitiveness" is the first premise of all social and industrial reform. This is merely a distorted Laborite expression of the neo-liberal trickle-down dogma stating that common interests are served by the rich getting richer.

Instead, workers must demand and fight for what they need, not what the union bureaucracy thinks the capitalists can afford. The needs of workers should be funded by a massive increase in taxes on the rich.

A fighting alternative also requires that workers reject any fightback that is focussed on the bourgeois courts. These institutions are part of the capitalist state's repressive apparatus. As instruments for the oppression of the working class, it is pure fantasy to think that they can be used to defend the interests of workers. On the contrary, legalistic manoeuvring will further impede workers' resistance, by removing from their scrutiny and sphere of influence any possible fightback or sell-out.

Workers must instead insist on class struggle methods to defeat the Bill. This means building a campaign of militant action aimed at making it impossible to actually implement the Bill.

This will necessitate organised defiance of the legislation and in the final instance, generalised strike action.

Any state repression of secondary boycotting caused by strikes must be fought against by every unionist.

Organised defence of picket lines will be essential to this task. This should be in the form of organised workers' defence groups who are accountable to the unions.

Although the ACTU leadership has been trying to fake a degree of militancy since the election of the Coalition, when it comes to the crunch they will avoid militant action. For communists and workers who already recognise the bureaucracy for what it is, this necessitates two central tasks over the coming period.

Firstly, it means demanding of the union bureaucracy that they organise the kind of fightback suggested above which can really defeat the Bill. Their resistance to doing so will expose in practice their collaborationist role to that mass of workers who still see them as some sort of defence against the Coalition.

Secondly, militants and communists need to build a rank and file movement based upon the self activity of ordinary workers, extending beyond individual union branches and industries. This will mean forming both rank and file Strike Committees to run all strikes, and democratic Strike Support Committees to support workers in struggle.

Such tasks are not optional extras if the Coalition's austerity drive and anti-union laws are to be defeated. They are burning necessities. Although we can demand that the bureaucrats undertake these tasks, we can't rely on them to do so. We have to undertake these tasks ourselves. Fight back now.



The meaning behind the Bill

If we are to believe the rhetoric of Howard and Reith, the justification for industrial relations reform is self-evident.

It is reducible to three main reasons, which they have been chanting mantra-like for some time now: 1) the existing system is an archaic barrier to economic development; 2) it concentrates too much power in the hands of unions at the expense of individual employee and employer "freedom"; 3) it keeps people jobless because it doesn't allow wages to find their "natural" market determined level.

In Howard's own words: "Until we get rid of our arthritic, old fashioned, essentially pre-World War I industrial relations system, we are not going to see the sort of long-term economic growth on a sustained basis that this country needs". Interestingly enough, the system that Howard and Reith have developed in their new Bill, pre-dates the present "arthritic" one. It is the 19th century system that had individual workers totally at the mercy of their bosses. This is what they have in mind when talking about "levelling up the playing field".

But is it true that the present system is a barrier to economic development? Only if by economic development you have in mind "capitalist" economic development for the benefit of local and foreign corporations. In so far as the present system acts as a partial defence of existing wages and conditions, it curbs the maximisation of profit that drives capitalist investment and development.

Thus from the viewpoint of the capitalists whom the state ultimately represents, the existing industrial relations system certainly restricts economic growth. That is why they want to change it.

What workers must remember is that such growth is not in the interests of the "Australian Nation" as is so often claimed, but is in the interests of the ruling class.

Then there is the notion that the present system concentrates too much power in the hands of unions. Unions allegedly subvert the "freedom" of parties involved in the negotiation of employment contracts.

This rests on the mistaken assumption that there exists equality between those parties - between capitalists and individual workers. Yet there is only the appearance of equality. In reality an individual worker is powerless when confronting an individual capitalist.

The latter has the power to deny the worker access to the means of production and hence the means of a livelihood. Thus it is meaningless to speak of the freedom of the worker under conditions where they must sell their labour power in order to live.

The relative powerlessness of workers is only reduced to the extent that they combine with other workers. Doing so enables them to more effectively coordinate their collective power against the capitalist: most importantly the power to withdraw their labour power.

Trade unions are precisely such combinations.

Therefore it is nonsense to say that they subvert freedom, when they in fact offer one of the few partial protections that workers have under capitalism.

But won't the new laws help create jobs by making labour more affordable for capitalists? Peter Reith thinks so: "By paying someone a lower rate because of their age, you're discriminating in favour of a young person to make sure they get a job"! (This from the man who endorsed the Prime Minister's "rock solid guarantee" that take home pay would not be cut under his party's policies).

By paying someone a lower rate you're discriminating against all workers. Lower pay rates for oppressed groups such as youth or women have the effect of putting downward pressure on all wages. Moreover, they discriminate against certain people by paying them less for no other reason than their membership of a particular group. This further divides the workforce, thereby weakening the ability of the working class to collectively resist attacks on their wages and conditions.

There is absolutely no evidence that lower wages create jobs or reduce unemployment. Throughout Labor's tenure in office wages decreased by 0.5 to 3% per annum.

At the same time there was an overall increase in unemployment. Indeed this has been the experience all around the world in the 1980s and 1990s - wages have fallen as unemployment increases.

All of the justifications for the new industrial laws are false. If Reith and Howard are convinced by their rhetoric, it is only because the ruling class have a stake in believing their own ideology.

If not, they are simply displaying the hypocrisy that all workers have come to expect of bourgeois politicians.

The Real Reasons

The real reasons for the new industrial relations laws are intimately tied to the government's wider attacks on welfare and workers. For the last two decades capitalism in Australia as elsewhere has been characterised by a general period of stagnation and crisis. Although there have been phases of relative growth and recovery, these have been followed by sharp declines.

These circumstances make it necessary for the ruling class to restructure the economy. Inefficient farms and firms have their subsidies removed to improve their economic performance as measured by profit rates; state expenditure on health, housing and education is reduced to pave the way for lower taxes on company profits; workers' wages and conditions are attacked to increase the rate of exploitation. This increases the proportion of wealth produced by workers that ends up in the profit ledgers of capitalist corporations.

From 1983 to 1996 these needs of the Australian capitalist economy were carried out under a Labor government in an Accord with the ACTU. However, there were limits to what could be achieved through this strategy. Labor was restrained by their links with the unions from carrying out the kind of comprehensive attack on collective bargaining that has now been initiated by the Coalition's Workplace Relations Bill.

If and when implemented, the new laws will enhance the capacity of employers to intensify the exploitation of workers. This is the real reason for the government's and big business's enthusiasm for the new laws - not their hypocritical concern for individual freedom.

Fighting the Coalition
Lessons of New Zealand

Over the past decade Kiwi workers have faced a massive decline in their living standards and ability to collectively resist the ruling class' onslaught. There are many valuable lessons for Australian workers who now face the wrath of the Coalition's budget and new industrial laws.

Capitalist restructuring in New Zealand has gone further and faster than in any other OECD country. As we would expect, the impact of this restructuring on the working class has been significant. However with only sporadic exceptions Kiwi workers have been restrained from waging the kind of militant resistance needed to defeat the neo-liberal onslaught.

The result has been a massive drop in unionisation, growing casualisation of the workforce, heavy cuts to wages, conditions and welfare services, and an accelerating upward redistribution of wealth. With the recent election of the Coalition in Australia, and the spectre of union-busting legislation looming, lessons from across the Tasman are particularly pertinent to Australian workers.



The New Zealand "Miracle"

It has become common in recent times for preachers of neo-liberal economics to hold up NZ as a shining example of the virtues of market deregulation, privatisation, welfare cutbacks and industrial relations reform. They claim that these measures have restored prosperity to NZ, by making the economy more internationally competitive and attractive to domestic and foreign investors.

Low inflation, steady economic growth and a falling rate of official unemployment over the last 3 years are posited as proof that neo-liberal economic restructuring was necessary.

This is an ideological falsity. The realities of contemporary NZ are very different from what the right wing ideologues and analysts would have us believe.

Over the last decade there has been a massive shift in wealth from workers to bosses. Cuts to health, education and welfare benefits have greatly reduced the level at which the state has had to tax profits. This has been compensated for by the implementation of a universal 12.5% goods and services tax.

Not surprisingly, both measures have had a disproportionate negative effect on the working class. In one simple stroke the cost of their basic living necessities increased by 12.5%, while the quality of and access to education, housing and health services decreased substantially.

At the same time the wages and conditions of working people have steadily declined. The implementation of successive waves of anti-worker legislation have eroded the capacities of workers to resist ruling class attacks. National's Employment Contracts Act (ECA) has led to a huge fall in unionisation and a growing fragmentation of the NZ working class.

This has been exacerbated by historically very high levels of unemployment, which has undermined the bargaining power of those still in work, while leading to poverty and destitution for those out of work. Benefit cuts for the unemployed and solo parents of up to 25% - in the interests of giving them an "incentive" to work - have put intolerable pressures on broad sections of the working class.

To boast about the stabilisation of NZ unemployment to around 6%, down from its high of 11%, is to ignore the facts. Much of the new employment is low paid, part-time and sporadic work. Furthermore, many who want and need jobs, such as students and those doing private domestic work, are not reflected in the official statistics.

As a result, homelessness, hunger, ill health and misery has increased for the many, while fantastic wealth has been accumulated by the few. This is the reality of the "New Zealand miracle" that the high priests of neo-liberal catechism are so fond of citing. But need things have happened in this way?

Labour in Power

As in Australia, the initial wave of neo-liberal capitalist restructuring in NZ occurred under a Labour government. Although there were continuities with the previous National party regime, Labour's economic agenda after its 1984 election victory marked a clear break with the Keynesian policies of the past.

In Labour's first term in office (1984-87) they cut welfare funding, adopted legislation aimed at remodelling the public sector in the image of the private sector, began privatising state assets, cut high income tax rates while introducing a universal goods and services tax, and removed many barriers to the movement of capital and commodities in and out of the country.

These and other deregulatory changes were consolidated and extended in Labour's second term in office, although the pace of change slowed from late 1988 as the political will of sections of the NZLP hierarchy faltered.

While the anti-worker reforms were not developed through an Accord with the union movement as in Australia, they were achieved with the acquiescence and even the complicity of many union leaders. Accepting the underlying rationale for restructuring, if not the scale and speed of its implementation, the CTU bureaucracy effectively paralysed working class resistance to the onslaught. This contributed to splits in both the NZLP and the trade union movement. The NZLP split in 1988 when Jim Anderton's New Labour Party (NLP) was formed. The trade union movement split in 1992 and saw the formation of a new and supposedly more militant federated trade union organisation called TUF (the Trade Union Federation).

Although partially expressing the frustration of workers with existing working class institutions, neither of these moves would prove effective for defending their interests. In many ways they would be a positive impediment to working class resistance. The NLP rapidly diluted its commitments to the defence of welfare and workers, while splitting the working class vote and allowing the Nationals a new mandate in 1993. The formation of TUF further divided workers and thereby weakened the potential power of the organised working class overall.

National in Power

With the election of the conservative National Party in 1990, the attack on the working class, which had faltered in 1988-89, was rekindled. Like their Australian counterparts in 1996, the NZ Nationals in 1990 sought to justify expenditure cuts with reference to the sorry financial legacy left by the previous Labour Government. In their notorious mini-budget of December 1990, National viciously targeted those least able to resist: solo-mothers, the aged and the unemployed. Welfare entitlement was tightened and benefits slashed by up to 25%. But the leadership of the trade union movement remained almost wholly inactive.

Thus at a time when decisive militant action was a glaring necessity, an angered working class was first demobilised then demoralised

Five months later the National government did what Labour had been unable or unwilling to do: they went for the jugular of the organised labour movement with the implementation of the Employment Contracts Act (ECA).

Among other things, this law removed the privileged bargaining position of unions in the workplace; ended the practice of the closed shop whereby every worker on a site had to be in the union; institutionalised individual employment contracts thus "freeing" workers to bargain individually with their employers; imposed much more stringent conditions for carrying out strike action; and exacted harsher penalties for violating labour laws. This was tantamount to a direct ruling class challenge to the very existence of organised labour.

What was the response of the trade union leadership? Basically it was inertia, passivity and trembling deference before a mobilised ruling class. The so-called national day of action against the ECA on Mayday 1991, saw tens of thousands of unionists throughout the country take to the streets. Yet wide-spread calls for generalised strike action were suppressed by the CTU bureaucracy. They were able to do so because of the absence of democracy, accountability and rank-and-file control within the unions. Denouncing workers' calls for a general strike as adventurism, the bureaucracy instead sought an accommodation with the government. In return for a place at the bosses' negotiating table, the CTU agreed to comply with the legislation.

Thus at a time when decisive militant action was a glaring necessity, an angered working class was first demobilised then demoralised. Militancy subsided, rates of unionisation began to fall and the capacities of workers to resist further attacks was weakened. There are few clearer examples in recent years of the bureaucracy's inherent class collaborationist instincts.

At the time, Workers Power NZ/Aotearoa (WPNZ/A) argued that what was necessary to defeat the ECA was a general strike. Given the political and economic significance of the ECA and its likely consequences if successfully implemented, and given the fact that many workers were themselves demanding general strike action, this was clearly the correct slogan for revolutionaries to adopt. Subsequent defeats of the workers' movement proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

By contrast, groups like the Stalinist Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ), who have now re-fashioned themselves as the Cliffite Socialist Workers Organisation (SWO), dismissed the call for a general strike as "left sectarianism". Echoing the stance of the CTU bureaucracy they instead called for a 24 hour strike. The Permanent Revolution Group (PRG), offspring of the Sparticist Tendency, likewise refrained from calling for what was necessary. In a striking expression of the confusion of a centrist sect, they demanded that the workers' movement "prepare for a general strike": as if preparing for what was necessary, was a substitute for actually doing what was necessary.

Far from defeating the ECA, these insipid slogans would only help demobilise workers. Combined with the CTU's incompetence, these approaches would act as safety valves for workers' discontentment and would dissipate their fighting energies. This is precisely what happened over the coming months, as the ECA became increasingly entrenched. WPNZ/A's call for a general strike then, far from being sectarian, was an accurate expression of the needs and militant potential of the NZ working class in the early months of 1991.

Five years later, the reality of being constrained from taking decisive action at the decisive moment haunts the NZ working class. The "NZ miracle" is only a miracle for capitalists who benefit from a low wage, high profit economy. For workers it means lower wages, less security, poorer living standards and fewer prospects.

It is a sad but true fact that unless Australian workers learn from and avoid the mistakes of the NZ campaign to fight anti-union legislation, they are doomed to the same reality. If 1996 is not to become for Australian workers what 1991 was for Kiwi workers, in the coming months we must fight for:

- Democratic fighting unions based on the self-activity of rank and file workers;
- Organised defiance of anti-union legislation up to and including generalised strike action;
- Effective solidarity and picketing across work-sites;
- Rank and file strike committees to run all strikes;
- The linking up of different sectors of the workforce and wider community under attack from the Coalition.
- The smashing of Howard's new Industrial Relations legislation!

Manchester bombing



Major is to blame

Why did the IRA bomb Manchester? Every worker, socialist and trade unionist should be clear. The Manchester bombing happened because John Major has given nothing to the anti-unionist population of Northern Ireland.

It happened because the current "peace process" is a sham. It is an attempt to trap anti-unionists into accepting the validity of the artificial Northern Ireland statelet and give up their struggle for the basic democratic right of self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole.

The extent to which the British state is prepared to go to achieve this objective is revealed by Major's refusal, backed by Blair, to allow any democratic representation for Sinn Fein, a party supported by nearly half the Catholic population.

The Manchester bomb, and mortar attack in Osnabrueck, are the IRA's response to this British determination to impose a peace settlement - a peace without justice. They are a response to John Major's refusal to recognise the right of Sinn Fein to participate in the current "peace talks", and the Northern Irish Assembly.

Majority

The vast majority of anti-unionists voted in the recent assembly elections. Nearly half of the anti-unionist population - 15.5% of the electorate - voted for Sinn Fein. They did so knowing that the IRA was refusing to decommission its weapons. Sinn Fein has every right to participate and Major has no right to deny them entry.

Major's obstinacy is consistent with his attitude to the previous ceasefire by the IRA. He made no concessions of any significance and it was this intransigence which led to the ending of the ceasefire in February. Throughout, Major has been determined not to negotiate a peace but force a surrender.

This is not just a reflection of the arithmetic at Westminster. It is true that Unionist support in the lobbies helps Major to survive; but from the point of view of the British state this is of passing significance. Far more important is their objective of grinding down, and if possible eradicating, the longest lasting struggle against British imperialism in the 20th century.

Having recognised that this could not be done by solely military means, Major's opening of secret negotiations with Sinn Fein some four years ago was the beginning of a political initiative to achieve the same ends. The huge bombs in the City of London undoubtedly added urgency to Major's calculations, as did the arrival in the White House of a President sympathetic to the Irish Catholic vote in the USA.

But while Major wanted peace, he did not want it on the basis of ending the partition of Ireland. From the very beginning of the public phase of the peace process - when Major and Reynolds issued their joint declaration - Major made clear that the protestant majority would have a veto over the future of the state.

To many this will seem fair enough - a majority is a majority. But that is precisely the big lie in Ireland. The "majority" was a tiny minority when Ireland voted for independence in 1918. It was a minority when Britain finally granted independence to 26 counties in 1921, in defiance of the 1918 majority vote. It was a minority that demanded and got the partition of the island and the creation of a six county state.

Why was it six counties, instead of the nine counties of Ulster?

Because all nine would have kept the protestants a minority. The border was drawn in 1921, to create a state with a protestant majority, against the will of the overwhelming majority of the country. Democracy had nothing to do with it. Britain acted to preserve its own interests.

Those interests led to the creation of an artificial state that created a new minority - catholic nationalists who could never unite with their compatriots and who could be systematically discriminated against in every walk of life and not be able to do a thing about it. No matter how many times they voted, their status - an imprisoned minority - ensured that nothing would ever change.

Nothing, that is, unless they took action themselves which they did on a mass scale in the 1960's, unleashing the latest phase of the long war in Ireland against British domination. The Provisional IRA was a product of this struggle.

When Major decided to launch his peace initiative he was banking on the war weariness of the population and a political retreat by Sinn Fein. A section of the Republican movement had already concluded that they could never win by solely military means.

For them the "peace process" opened up new prospects. They saw themselves following in the footsteps of Mandela and Arafat, securing a negotiated settlement as part of the New World Order.

Much was made of the ceasefire by the IRA. Equally important however was Sinn Fein's acceptance that any settlement would have to be acceptable to the majority in Northern Ireland. This implied a settlement within the existing framework, a recognition of the Unionist veto and an acceptance of the rules of the parliamentary game.

That is why Workers Power said that the ceasefire, and the agreements that accompanied it, were a dead end.

Two years on, it is clear how Major has exploited the concessions made by Sinn Fein, raising another pre-condition every time that an earlier one was met by Sinn Fein. Having made no progress after more than eighteen months, the IRA decided to end the ceasefire.

Adams' response to the Manchester bombs, "I want to see an end to the armed struggle. We are not involved in it. We do not advocate it", appears to give credence to suggestions that deep divisions are opening up within the Republican ranks.

Major would be only too pleased to allow these to develop and deepen.

Consequently, he will not drop his opposition to Sinn Fein's participation in talks. It is even possible that he will inforce his law and order credentials by a return to internment, secure in the knowledge that Blair's New Labour would back him all the way.

What is not so clear is the IRA's principal objective. Is it to prevent Adams being drawn into an unacceptable agreement?

Equally possible is the calculation that only another round of vastly expensive and spectacularly destructive bombings will convince the British to accept the dismantling of the Northern Irish state.

Elected

It is possible that this perspective is linked to the idea that a newly elected Labour Government, unrestrained by the Unionist veto at Westminster, would be a more willing negotiating partner.

Whatever the precise intentions of the IRA's tactics, what remains fatally flawed is its underlining strategy.

The whole method of restricting decisions making over the national question in Ireland to the military leaders of perhaps 400 IRA volunteers excludes from the picture the most powerful force in the whole of Ireland: the working class North and South.

The biggest defeat yet inflicted on the British in Ireland was the retreat from Stormont in 1972.

Then Britain was forced to abandon its sham Northern Ireland parliament. That was achieved not by bombings but by mass mobilisations.

The lesson is that to take the fight for a just peace forward the anti-unionists need to turn to mass mobilisations once again. The Northern Ireland assembly itself is a farce. Like Stormont it has a built-in protestant majority. Giving credence to any such elections by participating in them is wrong. The elections should have been boycotted.

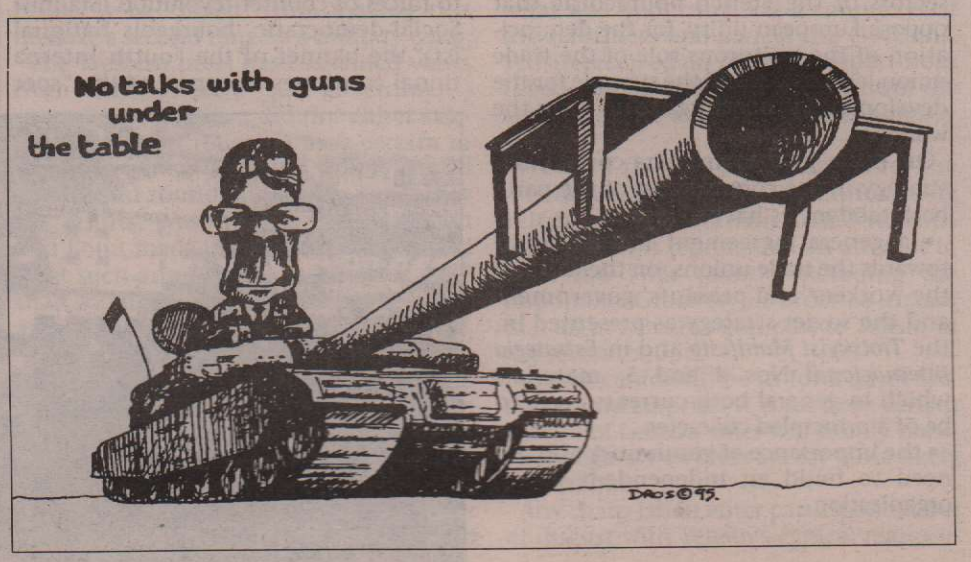
Nevertheless, now that a forum has been elected the struggle can and should move forward. What is needed now is to enforce the right of representation of all those who voted for Sinn Fein through mass mobilisation: strikes, demonstrations and occupations.

It is all too easy for Major to justify his intransigence in the face of bombs. It would be far more difficult in the face of a growing of campaign involving tens and hundreds of thousands on both sides of the border.

But the aim of such a struggle is not to endorse Sinn Fein's own peace strategy – which undoubtedly involves major concessions to Britain – or the IRA's guerilla strategy. It is to transcend these diplomatic and military deadends by raising the prospect of a mass campaign to get Britain out of Ireland, dismantle the six county statelet and secure national unification.

Immediately, such a campaign could begin to turn the tables on Major by focusing the need to remove the military underpinnings of the six county statelet - the British troops - and its repressive apparatus - the RUC/RIR, the non-jury courts, the emergency powers. It could lay the basis of a fight to replace the rigged Ulster Forum with the only type of elected chamber that would be consistent with a democratic solution - an all Ireland Constituent Assembly.

Such a campaign is also the way to create the sort of working class movement that can fight for these goals as part of a struggle for a 32 county socialist republic - the one form of unification that will guarantee an end to the persecution of minorities within Ireland and the persecution of that country by British imperialism.



Towards Revolutionary Regroupment

Since 1998 the main centrist current of degenerate Trotskyism in Latin America, the International Workers League (LIT) has been convulsed by crisis. Splits in its "mother party" in Argentina (the MAS) were precipitated by the death of its leader Nahuel Moreno in 1987, the collapse of Stalinism after 1989 and a series of defeats inflicted on the working class under President Menem. In turn the entire LIT has suffered splits. The first of these was the expulsion of the Internationalist Faction (IF) from the LIT in 1988, a faction led by what is now the PTS in Argentina. Other groups of the IF exist in Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Since the IF's expulsion from the MAS, for criticising its strategic adaptation to Stalinism, the response of the IF and the LRCI to major events in the new world order has been markedly similar. As a result the LRCI and the IF have been able to agree on the following declaration.

As a result of initial discussions, a study of the declarations of both tendencies and above all as a result of the visit of a representative of the LRCI to Argentina, the Internationalist Faction (IF) and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) recognise that there has been a convergence of programme and perspective during the last years between the two organisations.

On this basis we announce the following declaration of intent to our supporters, to the workers and popular vanguard of the countries where we work, and to the different tendencies that claim the banner of Trotskyism. This declaration of intent between the IF and the LRCI outlines areas of agreement and differences, as well as areas for further discussion to deepen our knowledge of the positions of both organisations. It includes steps to be taken to continue on the path of deepening relations between both tendencies.

It is the responsibility of the leaderships of both international tendencies to accelerate the initial convergence that we have noted, making every effort to overcome the conservative and sectarian pressures that we have been subjected to after years of isolation, and search for a resolution of the differences that remain. If we do not enter into this process, both tendencies run the danger of allowing the events of the next years to separate both groups, something that would impede the strengthening of a pole of struggle against revisionist currents that have usurped the name of Trotskyism.

Both currents, the IF and the LRCI, are the product of a struggle with centrist organisations that claim to be Trotskyist: the IF inside the LIT, and the LRCI traces its origins in a split from the International Socialists of Tony Cliff.

Like the LRCI, the IF insists that the Fourth International adopted clearly centrist positions at its Third Congress in 1951 and was transformed into a centrist movement by 1953. Both tendencies arrived independently at the conclusion that none of the fragments of the Fourth International after the war (eg. LIT, USFI, FI-IC, FI-OCRFI, CWI, ICL) represent the revolutionary continuity of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938.

Since 1989 we have witnessed fundamental changes in the post-war world, that have been an acid test for the programme and perspectives of all the important currents that claim to be Trotskyist. All of them have failed this test. Some have adapted themselves fatally to the nationalist and restorationist currents (which led some, such as the LIT for example, to state that there had been a "triumphant democratic revolution" in 1989/90). Others equated the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy with the liquidation of the workers' states, revealing thereby a profound adaptation to Stalinism.

Faced with all this the IF and the LRCI have arrived at a common evaluation of:

• the crisis of Stalinism, which has not made worse but rather increased the possibility of overcoming the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the workers' movement.

• the characterisation of the process opened up in the years 1989-91, and a common policy in the face of the central events of this process. We both raised the demand for revolutionary and socialist unification in the face of the events in Germany 1989-90. This was in sharp contrast to all those who argued either for the defence of the Berlin Wall and the Stalinist bureaucracy (eg. Sparticism, the USFI majority), as well as those who capitulated to Kohl and German imperialism with the (non-class) demand for "re-unification now!" (eg. both Lambertism and the LIT). In the same way tendencies opposed the attempt of the coup-makers in the USSR in 1991 and were in a bloc with those forces that struggled to stop it, while at the same time struggling to prevent Yeltsin from coming to power by advancing a policy for the working class to come to the head of the struggle for the political revolution.

• a convergent definition on the actual character of the states of eastern Europe and the ex-USSR today, rejecting the position that the process of restoration has finished and that capitalist states have been constructed in them.

Apart from these important areas of agreement, we also agree on:

• the view that after 1989 there has been a process of social-democratisation of the Stalinist parties, the bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism and the resurgence of new mediation forces of a reactionary character such as the Sao Paolo Forum in Latin America.

• the struggle against the imperialist blockade and the defence of the conquests of the Cuban revolution at the same time that we struggle against Castroite bureaucracy for the political revolution.

• during the war in Bosnia, the defence of the multi-ethnic character of this state, the right of national self-determination, raising both the necessity for the struggle for a workers' multi-ethnic Bosnia, the struggle against the imperialist intervention and for arms to the Bosnians.

• the appearance of new phenomena of struggle of the oppressed masses, such as the blacks in the USA, peasants in Mexico and above all the events in France in the struggle against the effects of the Maastricht Treaty. We agree on the need for an independent struggle against those sectors of the French bourgeoisie that oppose European unity, for the denunciation of the traitorous role of the trade union leadership, and the struggle for the development of self-organisation by the workers.

On more general matters concerning strategy in the construction of the party both tendencies have:

• a general agreement in the policy towards the trade unions, on the tactic of the workers' and peasants' government and the soviet strategy as presented in, the *Trotskyist Manifesto* and in *Estrategia Internacional* Nos 4 and 5, materials which in general both currents agree to be of a principled character.

• the importance of youth work and the need to build an independent youth organisation.

Areas of difference

1. We have a different evaluation of the character of the revolutions in China, Yugoslavia, Cuba and Vietnam. For the IF the key to the theoretical explanation of these events is to be found in the theoretical hypothesis contained in the Transitional Programme which argued that; "under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, Financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure etc) the petty bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie".

The LRCI believes that this hypothesis only applies to Stalinist parties, and that they can expropriate capitalism only after having liquidated the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses.

These differences on the character of the above revolutions open up a different interpretation of the theory of permanent revolution after the Second World War. Nevertheless, neither current considers that Stalinism is a centrist or progressive force, and the different interpretations do not appear to give rise to programmatic differences.

2. The LRCI does not agree with the slogan of a "Black Republic" that the IF used as part of its programme in South Africa.

3. The area of major difference is in regard to the question of reconstruction or refoundation of the Fourth International on a principled basis.

The IF considers that it is necessary to deliver a death blow to defeat revisionism that has usurped the name of Trotskyism, and that this blow is synthesised in the need to reconstruct the Fourth International. This is based on the fact that despite the capitulations and treason committed by the "Trotskyist" currents during the post-war period that have, at one time or another, capitulated to forces of counter-revolution (Stalinist, Social-democratic, bourgeois nationalist), the banner of the Fourth International continues to appear as the "spectre" of the social revolution, a flag that embodies a revolutionary tradition in the fight against imperialism, fascism and its agents in the womb of the workers' movement. In particular the FI is the only current that confronted Stalinism in a revolutionary way when it originally emerged, including confronting it in the concentration camps of Vorkuta.

Only the FI can present these revolutionary banners in the heart of Marxism, different to the prostitution that the currents have made in the name of Maoism or Castroism. For this reason the IF considers that it is totally unjustified to surrender these revolutionary banners to the centrist organisations that speak in the name of Trotskyism.

The LRCI considers that the demand for a "new, Leninist-Trotskyist International" best expresses the fact that the Fourth International ceased to exist as a unified or revolutionary international during the years 1951-53. Partial criticisms by various factions of various fragments of the Fourth International have failed to regenerate either the politics or organisation. The LRCI considers that the question of number is less important than the fact that such an international must be Trotskyist in ideology and proramme.

On the history of the Fourth International in the post-war, as we have already signalled, both consider that the FI was transformed into a centrist movement in the period 1951-53, and that none of the currents that emerged out of the fragmentation maintained continuity with the strategy and programme of Trotsky's FI founded in 1938. Nevertheless, to insist on this is not to suggest that during the post-war period distinct currents did not merge which episodically raised revolutionary positions in the face of events in the class struggle. The IF believes these positions to be part of the theoretical and political sharpening of principled Trotskyism and constitute important signposts for the reconstruction of a revolutionary strategy and programme.

The IF considers that these partial struggles allowed the maintenance—in a dispersed and scattered form—of threads of continuity with the revolutionary strategy and for this reason the IF does not agree with the concept of "petrified centrism" used by the LRCI.

Areas for Further Discussion

1. The IF wants to deepen the study of the materials of the LRCI on the post-war period, such as in the Trotskyist Manifesto where it argues that the productive forces were developed after the Second World War, trying to specify the sense of this affirmation and the implications of it for the character of the epoch as one of wars, crises and revolutions. The LRCI insists that its affirmation does not imply that there was a new stage of "neo-capitalism" such as was argued by Mandel, nor does it imply a change in the character of the epoch.



2. The exact nature of the situation opened by the years 1989-91.

3. Electoral tactics and when and how to give a critical vote to reformist bourgeois-worker parties and centrist organisations that claim to be Trotskyist.

4. The nature of the anti-imperialist united front (in particular the programme raised in relation to the US invasion of Haiti in 1994).

5. The nature of social oppression under capitalism (gender, youth, sexual orientation and racial) and the programme and necessary forms of organisation to overcome them.

6. The process of the construction of the party, the forms of organisations and tasks appropriate at different stages for increasing the size of the party, given its influence in the class struggle.

7. The nature of democratic centralism in an international tendency. Both organisations reject the tradition of the "mother party", as well as federalism based on diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, in initial discussions there seems to be difference on the degree of centralism and democracy that there would have to be in an international regroupment in the actual conditions of the stage of development of our tendencies. However, we agree that given the present state of relations between both currents we must prioritise the clarification and resolution of differences over aspects of theory, strategy and programme that we have outlined above.

Given what we have noted about the need for programmatic and strategic clarification, and of aspects of theory and history, we believe that the key to deepening relations between both tendencies will be our ability to arrive at common principled positions on today's class struggle. In the coming months this means that the LRCI and IF will attempt to arrive at a common evaluation of:

1. The French strike wave;
2. The resurgence of black struggles in the USA;
3. The EZLN in Mexico;
4. The resurgence of neo-Stalinism in Russia,
5. The revival of reformist and centrist currents such as represented by Scargill in his call for a new Socialist Labour Party in Britain. the convergence between the PCF and LCR, and the call for a Workers' Party that currents such as the LIT and UIT have made in France—to suggest only the most important;
6. The concrete programme for the development of the political revolution in Cuba

Stages for deepening relations between both tendencies

1. The first stage is an intensive study and exchange of materials, of translations of key materials of both currents, that will allow a better knowledge of positions by all the militants and leaderships of all sections in both international tendencies.

2. A second stage that evaluates if there is a sufficient basis to form a Liaison Committee between both organisations, which, through common work and discussion, will study whether the basis exists to move to a superior form of relationship, such as the fusion of both currents into a common international Trotskyist tendency. To discuss this we should convene a meeting in mid-April either in Buenos Aires or London.

3. Lastly, a delegation of the IF will attend the IEC of the LRCI in July 1996 where we will evaluate advances registered thus far and how to carry forward the relationship.

The signatories consider that this declaration of intent is an important step towards achieving a principled revolutionary regroupment of Trotskyism and consider it part of the struggle to defeat centrist revisionism that has usurped the name of Trotskyism.

We hope that the principled character of this declaration will influence other currents that claim to be Trotskyist and sectors of honest revolutionaries that are found inside centrist organisations and that in this sense it could act as a pole of attraction for international revolutionary regroupment.

Russia finds its new dictator?

Who is General Lebed? This article from British Workers Power, published on the eve of the second round of Russia's presidential elections, takes a closer look at the man who would be kingmaker.

In the first round of the Russian presidential elections on 16 June, Boris Yeltsin narrowly beat the Communist Party (KPRF) candidate, Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin received 25.1 million votes (34.8%) and Zyuganov 23.2 million (32.1%). In third place was the recently retired Lieutenant-General Alexander Lebed who gained 14.7% of the vote. Since then, Lebed has emerged as the real victor. On the eve of the second round, Lebed's power has grown massively, effectively making him Yeltsin's right hand man and chosen heir.

Until a few weeks ago, Lebed had bitterly criticised Yeltsin from numerous angles. He campaigned under the slogan "Truth and Order". He was highly critical of the war in Chechnya, blaming the corrupt head of the army Pavel Grachev, and Yeltsin's ally Alexander Korshakov, head of the presidential security guard, for having stoked up the war to preserve their power.

Lebed argued for immediate negotiations with the rebel Chechens. Whilst spouting Great Russian nationalist rhetoric, Lebed was not opposed to NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. At a recent meeting of Russian leaders with Clinton in Moscow, the US president said: "Of course you are all opposed to NATO expansion eastwards". Lebed alone growled "Not me!".

Until the late spring Lebed had been part of an attempt to create a third force—an alternative to both Yeltsin and Zyuganov. This project involved at various times Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the Yabloko Party, and Svyatoslav Fedorov of the Party of Workers' Self-Government. Attempts to unite these forces failed, partly because of conflicting egos, but also because of their different platforms: nationalist, neo-liberal and social democratic.

In the weeks immediately before polling day a series of media interviews and well-made TV adverts for Lebed appeared. This was a sure sign that Lebed had done a back-room deal with Yeltsin. Even western observers commented on the Yeltsin campaign's grotesque media monopoly, which got 75% of the print coverage and 90% of TV and radio time. Zyuganov got little coverage apart from the formal broadcasts specified by law on the state channel alone. At the same time, the media churned out every sort of anti-communist film and documentary that it could.

"Wrong choice"

On top of this, both the Russian media and the Western press implied that if Russian electors made the "wrong choice" in the first round, they would probably be "saved" from making this mistake a second time by a military coup.

The Western press has contained views from "authoritative" (i.e. government) sources that if Yeltsin did not either safely win the first round or look certain to win the second, he would simply cancel the second round altogether—or falsify the results. Washington, Paris, London and Bonn made it clear that they would treat such an outcome as a "lesser evil" than a Zyuganov victory. As the US magazine *Transition* commented in late May:

"Based on recent experiences on Azerbaijan and elsewhere, Western observers could well turn a blind eye. Western statesmen have made extraordinary efforts to aid Yelstin's re-election efforts, pledging about $15 billion in aid over the past two months. It is now too late for them to change course, and they would not let a few arithmetical 'errors' interfere with their national interests."

Lebed's high vote was due to a sudden opening to him by the media as well as his mopping up of the ultra-nationalist supporters of Vladimir Zhirinovsky (whose electoral support slid further to only 5.84%).

The significant difference between Yeltsin and Zyuganov's vote was social position:

"Entrepreneurs, people with high incomes, professionals and military personnel vote for Yeltsin. Workers, peasants and pensioners vote for Zyuganov," said Yuri Levada from the All-Russia Centre for the Study of Public Opinion.

Zyuganov started his campaign claiming to stand for those who suffered most from Yeltsin's disastrous policies to promote the restoration of capitalism. But as the campaign proceeded Zyuganov made ever greater concessions to Yeltsin. Most recently, he suggested that one-third of his future cabinet would be made up of Yeltsin supporters, and that he would actually give the premiership to Lebed.

Narrow

But even with his narrow win Yeltsin's position was not secure. There was no military coup, but a definite palace coup occurred amongst the warring cliques that surround Yeltsin.

The clique which has been dominant since the storming of the White House in late 1993 and the launching of the Chechen War consists of Korshakov, Mikhail Barasakov (head of the secret police), Pavel Grachev (war minister) and deputy prime minister Oleg Soskovets. They were known collectively as the "war party" and has pressurised Yeltsin for months to cancel the elections.

On the other hand there were the remaining "economic reformers" headed by Anatoly Chubais, former deputy premier and head of the privatisation program. Chubais, with the support (and collusion) of Lebed, seized on a bizarre incident when three of the "reformers" were arrested by Korshakov's Kremlin guard in possession of suitcase with hundreds of thousands of dollars in it.

Access

Denied access to the president, Chubais managed to break through Yeltsin's "praetorian guard" via the latter's daughter. They convinced the president that what was underway was a coup to oust the reformers and cancel the elections. Yeltsin received an offer of support from Lebed, who promised to help control the army and take action against Korshakov and co.

Whether this was a pantomime for the media or a pretext for announcing Yeltsin's new bloc with Lebed remains unclear. But it represented an attempt to junk the "war party", including the unpopular Grachev, in order to ensure that all of Lebed's votes pass to Yeltsin in the second round.

Yeltsin could still be in for a nasty second-round surprise. It is far from certain that all of Lebed's votes will simply transfer. Zyuganov's voters are far more likely to turn out.

Any sharp fall in voter participation, out of disgust with Yeltsin's cynical manoeuvres, could yet cost him the election. If, however, his tricks work and Yeltsin does indeed win the second round, then millions of Russians who hate all of his policies will have been conned onto voting for their continuation. The majority of the votes were cast for savage critics of Yeltsin.



Market means misery for Russian workers

One of Lebed's advisers has already remarked that if Yeltsin wins, "policy won't change much from what we've seen over the past two years" (*Herald Tribune* 24 June).

One of Chubais' advisers warns, however, that "there is going to be a day of reckoning after the election", because of the expenditures and wild promises. Putting these quotes together gives a good prediction: "more of the same—only much worse".

The causes for this, in the short term, lie in the price of Yeltsin's victory. Yeltsin has toured Russia handing out cash and promises of cash to ailing industries. Giving a whole new meaning to the term "sweeteners", he offered $10 million to one sweet factory alone.

The cost of his campaign promises by early May was estimated at between $5.6 and $10 billion. With tax revenues crumbling this year, the gap has been plugged by the IMF ($10bn), Germany (1.7bn) and France ($245m). Most of these donations have been delivered in person, as one western leader after another trooped to Moscow to pay tribute.

After the elections there is likely to be a wholesale collapse of tax revenues; a major banking crisis is just around the corner. The printing presses have been running overtime to create enough roubles to pay the enormous back wages. Another inflationary surge will wipe out the value of these increases.

The misled and swindled electorate will soon get the bill: cuts in state funding, loans to industry and social facilities will form part of a savage austerity package in the autumn.

What is Sectarianism?

The charge of sectarianism is a much used, but surprisingly poorly understood, term of abuse on the Left. It is important that revolutionaries understand the political character of sectarianism, and seek to avoid its various manifestations in their political practice and organisation.

"Fuck off, you're parasites", "You're sectarians", "You're nothing but a sect". These were the hysterical words of a leading member of the ISO when two members of Workers Power sought entry to their Keep Left conference in March - an event which had advertised "all welcome".

This was not the only time in recent months that Workers Power has been accused of being sectarian. After the publication of our first paper, which included an article on left regroupment that was critical of both the DSP and Militant, members of Militant and the groups in fusion discussions with them (Solidarity and Communist Intervention) also labelled Workers Power sectarian.

Unlike the ISO, they gave some reasons. Amongst other things, it was said that we are pre-occupied with political differences to the exclusion of acknowledging points of agreement on the left; that our paper attacked everyone else but did not positively put forward the politics of Workers Power; and that all we are interested in is sitting around "talking about theory."

Of course, for revolutionaries the charge of sectarianism is nothing new. Throughout the history of the Communist movement - from Marx and Engels themselves, through the various struggles of genuine socialists within the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Internationals - the label has been used by opportunists as a stick with which to beat those who have resolutely defended revolutionary principles and practice. It is a common term of abuse within the International Communist movement, a term routinely invoked by opportunists as a last resort to try to discredit consistent revolutionaries.

Yet despite the misuse and abuse of the term, it would be mistaken to conclude that the charge of sectarianism is always wrong, or that it is a phrase without definite content. As Trotsky pointed out, the concept sectarianism, as with related concepts such as centrism and opportunism, has a precise political meaning for Marxists.

Elements

We can identify several related elements of sectarianism and its expression in practice.

Firstly, at a general level sectarians subordinate the wider interests of the working class to the perceived interests of a particular left-wing group. Fetishising certain principles, thereby turning them into sectarian caricatures, such groups use the building of their revolutionary party as a rationalisation for abandoning the broader interests of the class.

Secondly, sectarians share with one another a detachment from the struggles of the working class and oppressed, and a refusal to struggle for partial and transitional demands.

This remoteness from struggle, and the wooden counter-posing of the maximum goal of socialism to the needs of workers as they exist today, is rationalised by the sectarian in the name of purity of principle. Unwilling to involve themselves in the daily struggles of workers and the oppressed lest they soil their revolutionary credentials, sectarians content themselves with denouncing others from the sidelines.

Thirdly, sectarianism is characterised by a refusal to wage a consistent and patient struggle within forums where workers' reformist illusions are presently expressed. It was precisely this manifestation of sectarianism which Lenin polemically demolished in his booklet *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder.* Here Lenin castigated all those who, under cover of radical-sounding phrases and an abstract commitment to "no compromises", repudiated in principle any communist participation within bourgeois parliaments and/or reformist parties in whom workers had illusions - regardless of tactical considerations.



Far from helping to solve the riddle of workers' continued illusions in bourgeois institutions and parties, such an arid sectarian position amounted to surrendering the fight for workers' hearts and minds, and abandoning them to their reformist misleaders. For Lenin, it was tantamount to closing one's eyes to the real difficulties posed by reformism and "trying to shrug them off with mere words." (1950, p78)

Fourthly, the sectarian revels in abstract ideas, with no perspective on how to apply those ideas to the living class struggle. Ideas therefore become ends in themselves. The dialectical interaction between theory and practice, program and experience, is discarded, and theory and programme is no longer informed and corrected by experience. Rather, any incongruous experience which may impinge upon the sectarian's rigid schemas is simply ignored or interpreted in such a way as to make it compatible with those schemas. The Communist programme - which, in the true spirit of revolutionary Marxism, is always developing to reflect new realities - is thus transformed by the sectarian into a lifeless tome having more in common with the old testament than a "manual of action for millions".

Finally, the sectarian spirit can be clearly discerned in its attitude to others on the left. Rather than seeking principled bases upon which to fight the common class enemy, the sectarian seizes upon every contact with other leftists as an occasion for attacking their detested rivals. Political life becomes primarily a point-scoring exercise. Rather than seriously trying to point a way forward for the forces engaged in progressive struggles, and trying to win elements of those forces to one's own outlook through reasoned argument, the sectarian puts all of their energies into rhetorically "exposing" the alleged crimes of others.

While it should be obvious to any principled revolutionary that criticism itself is not to be equated with sectarianism, it should be equally obvious that the transformation of "denunciation" into a principle and a past-time, is a definite impediment to resisting capitalist attacks let alone building a viable revolutionary party.

To sum up, sectarianism is a disease within the socialist movement, which offers no way forward for the working class. Trotsky summed up its essence nearly 60 years ago in words as relevant today as they were then:

Sectarians are capable of differentiating between but two colours: red and black. So as not to tempt themselves, they simplify reality... Incapable of finding access to the masses, they therefore zealously accuse the masses of inability to raise themselves to revolutionary ideas.

These sterile politicians generally have no need of a bridge in the form of transitional demands because they do not intend to cross over to the other shore. They simply dawdle in one place, satisfying themselves with a repetition of the selfsame meagre abstractions. Political events are for them an occasion for comment but not for action. (*The Transitional Programme*, 1972, p55)

Sectarianism is a disease within the socialist movement, which offers no way forward for the working class.

Is Workers Power sectarian?

Reading the above lines, it will be immediately apparent to anyone acquainted with the Australian left that sectarianism is readily identifiable in this country (see accompanying article). But not in the politics or practice of Workers Power.

Many members of centrist organisations would disagree. For some, the mere facts of Workers Power's small size and its willingness to politically criticise are sufficient to confirm that we are sectarians. However, their arguments will not withstand even the most cursory examination.

It is politics and practice that define sectarianism, not size. If a small membership was a defining feature of sectarianism, it would seem that all new communist organisations throughout history were sectarian by definition.

Yet this would plainly be a ridiculous claim to make. Even the largest of left-wing organisations may be sectarian, in some or all of the ways that we have outlined above. Anyone acquainted with the British SWP (purportedly with a membership in the vicinity of 10,000) could confirm this. Their attitude and orientation to the rest of the left, their dogmatism in persisting with ideas and perspectives which are plainly at odds with reality and their disposition to put the interests of the SWP before the interests of the working class, all signal that they are sectarian. The difference is that they are a large sect - but they are a sect nonetheless.

As for the suggestion that political criticism is a symptom of sectarianism, we must remind our accusers of one of the ABCs of communism: political criticism is an essential driving force behind the political clarification needed to effectively wage the class struggle. It is the means by which reformists are won to revolutionary politics. It only becomes sectarian when practiced as an end in itself in the trivial point scoring way suggested above. Workers Power does not use this method of political practice, as any honest appraisal of our work over the last twelve months would show.

Several other accusations that Workers Power is sectarian have been made. Closer scrutiny reveals that they too are devoid of any real substance.

(1) "Workers Power is sectarian because they are pre-occupied with political differences to the exclusion of acknowledging points of agreement on the left".

This criticism derives its impetus from the sharp polemics that we carried in our first publication. We make no apologies for these. Workers Power is a new organisation on the Australian left and the paper was our first publication. As such, it was and remains necessary to clearly distinguish ourselves politically from other left-wing organisations: to say this is who we are, what we stand for, and why we have chosen the strenuous road of building a new revolutionary communist organisation rather than joining one of the existing left groups.

This is not symptomatic of a group 'pre-occupied' with political difference - if pre-occupied is taken to mean self-absorbed navel-gazing that precludes the possibility of principled political convergence and/or cooperation with others on the left. It is symptomatic of a group that places a premium value on programmatic clarity and firmness in political principle. If this is what our accusers mean by 'pre-occupied', we are happy to plead 'guilty as charged'.

This does not mean that we exclude acknowledging points of agreement with others on the left. On the contrary, we are fully prepared to acknowledge points of agreement and we encourage political convergence and common actions when these are on a principled basis.

But what we won't do is conceal important political differences for the sake of preserving a superficial left unity or making friends and influencing people. This is the approach of opportunistic petit-bourgeois dilettantes, not revolutionary communists.

(2) "Workers Power is sectarian because their paper attacks everyone else on the

left without positively putting forward their own politics".

People who make such assertions either have not read our paper or are wilfully misrepresenting the truth. Every article of our paper puts forward our own politics. In the last paper we included: commentary and analysis on the current conjuncture and immediate tasks of the workers' movement in Australia; examination of important international class struggle issues; detailed outlines of our position on Women's Liberation, Fascism and the Environment; and, only later in our paper, two polemics contrasting our own politics with that of other significant left-wing groups.

This hardly seems to constitute a paper which does nothing but attack everyone else without positively putting forward our own politics.

(3) "Workers Power is sectarian because all they are interested in is sitting around talking about theory".

It is true that Workers Power places a high value on revolutionary theory and programmatic education of its cadres. We fully embrace the Communist axiom "no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory." It is only on the solid foundation of Marxist theory that a proletarian party can be forged that is capable of withstanding the ideological pressures of class society.

However, we do not view theory as an end in itself. Theory is a means for adequately understanding the world in order to change it. The lessons learned from efforts to change the world must in turn contribute to the re-elaboration and refinement of theory - which in the final analysis refers to the generalised lessons of the class struggle, reproduced in forms of thought and codified into a programme. These generalised lessons must be internalised by members of the Leninist vanguard party, and applied to the living class struggle.

This is the method of Workers Power and our international body, the LRCI (League for a Revolutionary Communist International). It is both inaccurate and dishonest to suggest that all we are interested in is sitting around talking about theory.

Our work over the last 12 months is the best repudiation of this shallow attempt to paint us as just another group of sectarians. Despite the small size of Workers Power, our members have consistently participated in united front actions with others involved in progressive struggles against the class enemy.

Amongst other activities, we have: participated in organising anti-fascist actions in 1995; involved ourselves in ongoing work in various forums organising to defend education; helped to build the mass actions by tertiary education workers and students; worked within the defence committee to defend student activists charged with criminal offences; intervened into the health and community service worker's dispute in early March; supported IWD rallies; defended migrants against racist immigration laws and education policies; and actively supported and solidarised with workers in various industrial actions.

Clearly this work is modest when measured against what is necessary, or against the capacities of much larger groups. We freely admit this, while striving to outgrow the human and material limitations which restrict our activities to these modest proportions.

Yet we would add that our work on the ground, for all its acknowledged limitations, is commensurate with our size and resources and clearly demonstrates an appetite for fighting to apply our revolutionary theory, not just talk about it.

Workers Power, and the LRCI more generally, is not a sectarian organisation. It is a revolutionary communist organisation fighting to build the foundation of a vanguard party of the type Lenin insisted was necessary to achieve a workers' state and eventually a classless society. Part of this task is the continual struggle within and between avowedly revolutionary groups, for the clarification of revolutionary ideas and principles.

Pursuing such clarification is not the mark of sectarianism, but the mark of principled communism seeking to avoid the swamp in which sectarianism and opportunism meet.



Who is sectarian?

While not exhausting the list, the most consistent local representatives of sectarianism are the Socialist Labour League (SLL), the Sparticist Tendency and the ISO. We examine the main manifestations of their sectarianism.

The SLL

Notwithstanding their abstention from united front work with others on the left and their clownish "boycotts" of the annual May day rally, the SLL's sectarianism is expressed most clearly and forcefully in their orientation to Labor and the trade unions.

With respect to the former, the SLL mechanically read off from the facts of the ALP's betrayals over a 13 year period, that it is a matter of indifference to the working class whether Labor or the Coalition is in power.

This is patently wrong. The ALP is still a bourgeois workers' party (BWP) - bourgeois in that it defends capitalist property and profitability, but a workers' party in that it has a base in the working class and is linked to it through the trade union movement. This contradiction, which necessitates that Labor attack its working class base in order to satisfy its ruling class masters, is exposed most transparently when Labor is in power.

For this reason, revolutionaries think that at the present time it is preferable to have Labor in office doing the job for capitalism, rather than cowering behind the opposition benches posing as "friends of workers". Therefore, it was incumbent upon revolutionaries to critically support Labor at the 1996 federal election.

But this the SLL would not do, preferring instead to run their own candidates where possible, and to rhetorically denounce Labor, as if doing so would help break workers' illusions in reformism.

Such impotent sectarianism is reproduced even more starkly in their orientation to the existing trade union movement. Aping the stalinised Comintern's disastrous "left turn" in the late 1920s and early 30s, the SLL mistakenly infer from the numerous sell-outs of the ACTU bureaucracy that there is nothing left worth defending in the existing trade union movement. Effectively ignoring the 3 million workers whom the ACTU still organises, they call for the formation of a new union movement. In practice this would mean abandoning the mass of workers to their present mis-leaders.

This is nothing more than a political crystallisation of the impatience which is so characteristic of sectarian tendencies.

Yet as Engels shrewdly commented with regard to the sectarian Blanquists in the 19th century, "What childish innocence it is to present one's own impatience as a theoretically convincing argument".

Far from representing a continuation of the revolutionary tradition, the SLL represents a definite continuation of Healyite political degeneracy.

The Sparticist Tendency

The Sparticist League and their international affiliates, the International Communist League (ICL) duplicate many of the mistakes of the SLL. Their understanding of and tactical orientation to reformism is no less inept and sectarian than that of the SLL. Although they do not formally call for the establishment of new unions as do the SLL, their effective abstention from "the hard class struggle", as they like to call it, leads to a similar abstract perspective and lack of activity.

Occasionally the Spartacists attempt to conceal this politically impotent approach to the struggles of workers and the oppressed, by engaging in a little "exemplary work". While the notion and practice of exemplary work (an example on a small scale of how the group would operate if it were larger) is a legitimate and necessary one for small fighting propaganda groups, the Sparticist's application of it is a sectarian caricature.

For them, exemplary work generally consists in shrill denunciations and provocation of other left groups. This is itself an expression of the Sparticists' stated raison d'etre of "destroying ostensibly revolutionary organisations".

There is no more striking example of the bankruptcy of such "exemplary" work than what occurred at a recent anti-VSU mobilisation at La Trobe University. This mobilisation was specifically called for May 8, in consultation with the National Tertiary and Education Industrial Union (NTEU), to coincide with a national stop-work meeting of tertiary education workers. Hence, in addition to it being an anti-VSU action, it was importantly a solidarity action, intended to illustrate the common struggle of students and workers.

For the politically illiterate members of the Sparticist Tendency however, this fact was of no consequence whatsoever. Ignoring all intrusions of reality they concluded that all who supported the La Trobe action were "scabs", and proceeded to abuse all and sundry before departing, purportedly to carry out a little more "exemplary work" at the stop-work meeting! If this is an example of how they would operate if they were larger, one can only be thankful that their congenital sectarianism condemns them forever to the barren, but largely harmless, life of a sect.

The ISO

It might come as a surprise to some that we view the ISO (and, we should add, their progeny Socialist Alternative) as sectarian. After all, don't they engage in struggles on the ground? Do they not avoid the sectarian mistake of counterposing the maximum goal of socialism to the needs of workers as they exist today? Is the fact that their affiliates in Britain (SWP) have built a comparatively large organisation not proof that their methods are not sectarian?

While these descriptions are partially accurate, that does not mean that the ISO is less sectarian, or more revolutionary, than groups who habitually declare their sectarianism with every speech and intervention that they make.

The difference lies in the form in which the ISO's sectarianism is manifested, and in the fact that they attempt to conceal their sectarianism behind economistic practices.

Let's confine ourselves to just two expressions of the ISO's sectarianism. One good example is the ISO's anti-Fascist work.

In 1994 and 1995 the Coalition Against Nazis (CAN) crystallised as the most effective organised expression of anti-fascist action in Melbourne. The ISO, because of the weight of its membership, was able to have disproportionate influence within CAN forums. While this was the case they were happy to prioritise anti-fascist work and cooperate with others on the left - as 'senior partners'.

In 1996 however, things changed. Increased fascist activity in Melbourne (including an attack on an ISO member's home) in the first months of the year demanded renewed vigilance and action against these thugs. But since calls for the organisation of these renewed efforts were initiated by members of Militant and various other individuals and groups, the ISO refused to enter into the collective development of this anti-fascist work.

Why? Because the loss of membership due to the split in their organisation, meant that they would not be able to shape the direction of the anti-fascist work to the extent that they could in previous years; and because the prospects for this important work contributing to the growth of the ISO were not great.

For the ISO, the interests of the working class are subordinate to the interests of the ISO.

The second instance of the ISO's sectarianism can be discerned in their attitude to others on the left and their response to political criticisms.

The ISO's habitual reaction to even the mildest of criticism is to either banish it from their midst by bureaucratic methods, or to dismiss it as the unreasonable ravings of sectarians!

Thus two members of Workers Power were banished from the ISO's Keep Left conference in March, and subject to an unprovoked tirade of abuse by one of its so-called leaders.

No doubt this was because the ISO anticipated Workers Power raising thorny questions that they would sooner not have to try to answer in front of another batch of potential recruits - recruits who will no doubt be the fodder for yet another round of bureaucratic expulsions some time in the future.

An open invitation

The politics of the ISO, SLL and the Sparticist League are living testament to the truth of Trotsky's insightful observation that sectarianism and opportunism are two sides of the same coin.

To the subjective revolutionaries and committed activists in all of these organisations, and to those who are as yet unaffiliated but who recognise the necessity of the revolutionary party for the fight for socialism, we say reject sectarianism.

We invite you to explore and discuss with us the politics and programme of Workers Power.

workers power

League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), Australia
PO Box 4, Armadale North, Victoria, 3143

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Smash VSU: Fight Repression



The La Trobe University Students Representative Council has run out of money and is set to lay off staff. The crisis at La Trobe has forced into sharp focus the debate about how to fight VSU.

The major question facing student officials and La Trobe activists is what to do next. Options that have so far been raised include applying for a loan from the university to carry on till the end of the year; restructuring the SRC to comply with VSU; or collecting a voluntary fee.

It is important to remember that all is not lost. The SRC still has its offices and equipment, it still has resources to organise. The first issue that must be addressed is how the SRC can continue operating in the short term so that it can continue to fight. Student unions and trade unions across the country must be called upon to donate money immediately. No loan should be sought from the administration. A General Student Meeting should demand that the university give the SRC this money with no conditions. A campaign should be built to have the issue of the General Service Fee level and allocation decided entirely by students with no university intervention.

A voluntary fee should be considered a last resort at this stage, as it accepts the logic of the VSU legislation. Any moves to a voluntary fee must ensure that the university does not set up its own "student union" and begin directing GSF funds to it. If there is retructuring to be done, it must be to turn the SRC into a student union with an actual participating membership. Currently the SRC technically consists of only 19 members.

The present crisis offers the greatest potential to mobilise La Trobe students and to actually put in place structures such as a class delegate system, which will make the SRC a more representative student union. At every step union officials and La Trobe activists must ensure that mass student meetings determine the direction of the campaign and that the university continues to recognise the SRC as the student union on campus.

Arrested Students

The crisis of the La Trobe SRC is occurring in the context of students facing charges for anti-VSU activities. More arrests are expected after a demonstration at La Trobe on May 8 where admin. doors were kicked in. The Age and RMITV offices were raided by police to obtain photographs of students involved in these actions.

Meanwhile, three members of the Anti-VSU 4 who pleaded guilty to lesser charges have received fines with no convictions.

This leaves La Trobe SRC president, Jane Kemmelfield, who pleaded not guilty to incitement and acting in concert to commit criminal damage. While police evidence on these charges is flimsy, these are also the most politically significant charges. If found guilty on such evidence then any of the 300 students at the demonstration could likewise be found guilty of similar "crimes".

The case of the anti-VSU 4 was pursued by police on direct orders from the police commisioner Neil Comrie, and has involved a significant amount of resources. This is the real reason as to why the police refuse to drop the case against the remaining member of the group. According to the Detective Seargant Mookie in charge of the case they haven't got a "good enough excuse" to drop the charges.

The campaign for the Anti-VSU 4 has suffered as a result of the Student Defence Committe separating itself from the Student Unionism Network. This has meant that the campaign has not be properly built. In the context of continuing arrests, and the political implications of the remaining case, a militant campaign must be built to drop the charges on what is clearly a politically motivated charge.

Defend La Trobe's SRC
Drop the charges on thePresident