
THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE



EASTER WEEKEND 1986 · 28th-31st MARCH
NEW SOUTH WALES INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
BULLETIN NUMBER 1 · FEBRUARY 1986

THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE

BULLETIN Number 1/86

February 1986



From the National Organisers

CONTENTS

From the National Organisers	2
Draft Statement for the Broad Left Conference	3
The Broad Left Conference Draft Statement – A Critique <i>by Peter Christov et al. (Vic.)</i>	4
Women and the Broad Left Conference <i>by Sue Jackson and Anna Kokkinos (Vic.)</i>	5
Victorian pre-Conference Meetings <i>by the Victorian Conference Organizing Committee</i>	6
The New Right: Hysteria and Reality <i>by Tricia Caswell (Vic.)</i>	7
Socialism and Survival <i>by John Wishart (S.A.)</i>	7
Environmental Issues and the Broad Left Conference <i>by Jonathon Goodfield (Vic.)</i>	8
Improving Practical Co-operation Between All Sections of the Progressive Movement should be the Chief Focus of the Conference <i>by D. Ross (Newcastle)</i>	9
Unions and the Broad Left Conference <i>by George Koletsis (Vic.)</i>	9
A Left View of the ACTU/ALP Accord <i>by Pat Clancy (N.S.W.)</i>	10
The Broad Left Conference: Strategies, Tactics and Action for Industrial Democracy and Social Responsibility <i>by Dain Bolwell and Max Bound (Tasmania)</i>	11
The Broad Left Conference: Why women should go and what they should do when they get there <i>by Tricia Caswell (Vic.)</i>	11
Socialist Feminism and the Broad Left Conference <i>by Jane Martin (N.S.W.)</i>	12
A Summary of the Paper – Left Strategies <i>by Max Bound (Tas.)</i>	12
A First Response <i>by Jeff Richards (S.A.)</i>	13
The Need for Unified Action on Contemporary Issues <i>by Jack Cambourn (N.S.W.)</i>	14
Some Thoughts on the Conference Program <i>by Jim Levy (N.S.W.)</i>	15
Queensland Report	15
The Getting Together Conference	15

My co-worker Ros Smidt and I would like to outline the processes by which you can get more information about the Broad Left Conference, register for the Conference, arrange to give a paper, seminar or workshop at the Conference, or contribute to the next Bulletin.

First, Ros and I can be contacted on (02) 264-3696 during office hours. An answer phone will record your message and we will get back to you if we are not in the office when you ring. We are very happy to speak to groups or individuals about your concerns and ideas for the Conference.

If you have filled out and sent us the slip on the back of the Broad Left Conference pamphlet you will automatically receive the Conference Bulletin, Conference program and registration form. Otherwise, you can write to us at P O Box 17, Railway Square, Sydney 2000, requesting any of the above. If you cannot attend the Conference but wish to receive the Bulletin, please forward your name, address and \$10 fee to the P O Box.

Deadline for contributions to the next Bulletin is March 1st. Contributions need to be limited to 1000 words. Dates of further sponsors, meetings and pre-Conference discussions are available from your State Organising Committee.

South Australia (08) 267 3915
Victoria (03) 497 2130
Queensland (07) 832 5587
A.C.T. (062) 81 5584
W.A. (095) 24 1021 (a/h)

For contact with regional centres and other states, please phone Sydney organisers.

JANE MARTIN
Conference Organiser

CHILDCARE will be available during the Broad Left Easter Conference. Contact the organisers for details on (02) 264 3696.



Draft Statement for the Broad Left Conference

by George Campbell, Peter Robson, Barbara Murphy, Meredith Burgmann, Patrick Lee, Brian Aarons, Ken McLeod, Fay Campbell, Ted Wheelwright, Nando Lelli Pat Clancy and endorsed by 300 plus sponsors from around Australia.

Pressing issues of current concern strongly suggest that broad left and socialist forces should come together in an open atmosphere to discuss perspectives for the left in Australia. We believe that it is both desirable and timely for those broad left forces who share similar perspectives to discuss how to develop more effective left responses to current political developments in Australia, and to the vital issues of the 1980s and 1990s.

The left faces two major strategic issues at present:

- Firstly, the emergence of a much more radical and ideologically confident right wing, which has launched a new conservative offensive against the labour and progressive movements, designed to roll back many social reforms and to put in office hardline conservative governments of the Thatcher and Reagan models.
- Secondly, the challenge of building effective mass movements for progressive reforms and more far reaching changes in a period of Labor Governments, and the relationship of left and progressive forces to the existing Labor Governments.

The resurgent right has built significant links in the corporate sector, universities and private research institutions, sections of the public service, and mainstream conservative political parties. It is mounting an increasingly powerful offensive against many of the progressive advances made by unions, women's groups, Aboriginal communities, environmentalists and various other social action movements during the 1960s and 1970s.

The right has mounted a well-organised and well-funded ideological offensive, which seeks to change the political agenda by promoting hardline free-market economic theories, together with other conservative and reactionary values such as racism and traditional notions of women's social role.

However, the right's strategic goals extend well beyond the re-affirmation of conservative ideas and values. They also

aim for fundamental changes in the structure of Australian society, in such key areas as the capital/labour relationship (through technological change in the work process, various forms of self-employment and anti-union employment practices, and selective de-regulation of the labour market); public enterprise (privatisation and the marginalisation of forms of public ownership); the welfare state (cuts in social services, regressive tax reform); and education (rolling back progressive reforms, community involvement and student-centred approaches).

The Queensland Government's anti-union legislation and the surgeons' assault on Medicare are two recent examples of the conservatives' political offensive which aims to destabilise the political situation and create the conditions for the election of hardline conservative governments.

The left should respond to this challenge with its own renewed offensive seeking to build broad alliances to defend basic social and economic rights, and to extend the previous gains of the post Cold War period. The left can assist the renewal of mass movements for social change by developing a more coherent left program for social and economic change, drawing on the needs and demands of the movements themselves.

At Federal, State and Local Government levels, Labor administrations are retreating in many important policy areas in the face of right-wing pressure and real economic and financial difficulties. In particular, the Hawke Government's performance has raised serious concerns in several areas where it has failed to deliver on Labor's promises and its supporters' expectations. In some key instances it has bowed before local and foreign pressures from corporations and the money markets, whose aims are to destroy the government eventually and in the meantime get what they can by "boring from within".

The challenge for the left is to prevent the return of Liberal/National Governments as representatives of the resurgent right and at the same time develop constructive and well-based left policies on issues of mass concern. This would in turn strengthen the ability of the labour and progressive movements to influence political events and the direction of Labor Governments.

Our concerns are many but the main ones include:

- The continued escalation of the nuclear arms race and the drift to nuclear war, and in particular the pressures to push US policies on New Zealand, Australia and other Pacific nations, tying them into a global nuclear strategy against their own national interests.
- The threats to our national and economic independence from the

influence and control of multinational corporations and financiers, and from the rundown of our manufacturing industries in the absence of a national industry-development plan which puts new technology to the service of human and social needs.

- Continuing high levels of unemployment, accompanied by growing poverty and an increasing gap between rich and poor, both nationally and globally, problems which can only be tackled by radical redistributive policies on wages, taxation and social services.

- Continuing obstacles to the granting of meaningful land rights for Aboriginal people which would give them adequate control, especially over mining.

- Failure to fully implement key aspects of the ACTU/ALP Accord, including effective price control, aspects of tax reform and the social wage, and key elements of economic policy such as industry policy and regulation of financial institutions.

- The need to further develop the labour movement's Accord strategy through which labour effectively intervenes on the production side as well as distribution, on the social wage as well as the industrial wage, and on economic and industry planning and industrial democracy as well as immediate workplace concerns.

- The need for more resolute education and action to overcome the social disadvantages of women and the attitudes which accompany and give rise to discrimination against them.

- The re-emergence of racism, coupled with cutbacks on already-limited services for the specific needs of migrant workers and ethnic minorities. These threaten the fragile concept and practice of multiculturalism, with its goal of equal opportunities for migrant workers and ethnic minorities to fully participate in Australian society and to maintain and develop their own cultures and languages.

- Growing concentration of private media ownership and control, and the harmful consequences of this for democratic discussion of social issues.

- Increasing multinational and national pressures to cut back the public sector at Federal, State and Local levels, and to privatise public enterprises such as Telecom, TAA and the Commonwealth Bank.

- The co-ordinated and widespread assault on education by conservative forces seeking a narrow, authoritarian and uncritical schooling process, together with effective pressures to cut back promised government funds for public education while appeasing wealthy private interests.

- The growing need for discussion and action towards a society which provides adequate material wellbeing to all while conserving the environment and resources for further generations.

• And finally, the increasingly tense and dangerous international situation which affects domestic issues and Australia's future.

In our view, these and other issues should be discussed by the broad left forces with the aim of developing agreed perspectives for work in the labour and progressive movements to:

combat reactionary and conservative forces;

develop pressure for progressive and democratic changes;

promote the need for more far-reaching changes which really tackle basic social problems;

build a more effective left in Australian politics.

We believe that a national broad left conference could make a significant contribution to these tasks. The sponsors listed below are calling such a conference for Easter, 1986 preceded by discussions and conferences in regions and centres, and are inviting a broad range of left activists to attend.

We invite you to attend the conference, take part in lead-up discussions, and to send us any views about the agenda and format of the conference.



The Broad Left Conference Draft Statement – A Critique

by Peter Christov, Ros Eason, Boris Frankel, Belinda Probert, Alan Roberts and Richard Tanter (Victoria)

We are writing as Victorian recipients of your original invitation to sponsor the Easter Broad Left Conference. We are all agreed that it is desirable and indeed urgent to attempt such a gathering of left forces, although most of us have not accepted the invitation for a variety of reasons – some because they felt their Easter commitments would not allow them to participate adequately, others from doubts about the draft statement, which could not be pursued with you because of the short time available before the original deadline of August 31.

We have now received your second letter (October 11) and wish to let you know of some anxieties it raises. These concern the draft statement, and the sentence in your letter: "We cannot engage in substantial rewriting and amending, but we are considering incorporating suggestions which seem to improve the draft without altering its general stance".

We have heard reports that proposals were submitted to you for some fundamental expansion of the range of views represented by the draft – in particular, to give recognition to ecological considerations and to the varying views on the left towards the Accord. However, this sentence in your letter seems to rule out any such amendments.

It is possible that you are not fully conscious of how limited are the views encompassed by the draft, and how unsuitable it is as a rallying-point for any left assembly which deserves the title "Broad".

We would like to illustrate this by showing the "main concerns" in the draft statement, followed by our comments on their formulation (in italics).

• 1. The continued escalation of the nuclear arms race and the drift to nuclear war, and in particular the pressures to push US policies on New Zealand, Australia and other Pacific nations, tying them into a global nuclear strategy against their own national interests.

1. This implies that Australia is not at present a nation tied into a global nuclear strategy, but only runs the risk that "pressures" will make it so. Many people would see this as contrary to fact. It also states as its sole criticism of such an involvement, that it is against Australia's national interests. It can be argued – particularly in the light of the "nuclear winter" studies – that this is secondary, compared to the contribution thereby made to the preparation and likelihood of a nuclear war that would devastate, and perhaps altogether eliminate, humanity's present achievements on a global scale. The appropriate balance between such views, from which the main thrust of propaganda should emerge, should properly be left to the Conference rather than assumed in advance.

• 2. The threats to our national and economic independence from the influence and control of multinational corporations and financiers, and from the rundown of our manufacturing industries in the absence of a national industry-development plan which puts new technology to the service of human and social needs.

2. Here again the over-riding importance of nationalist concerns is apparently stressed, to the exclusion of class-based or internationalist views, which would refuse to see it as proper to couch the problems solely in terms of "foreign" employers and "our" industrial

structure. Quite apart from ideological argument, important practical questions are involved here – such as the degree of protectionism, if any, which it is proper to advocate. The statement should pose such questions rather than go a long way towards giving an answer – as the present formulation appears to do.

• 3. Continuing high levels of unemployment, accompanied by growing poverty and an increasing gap between rich and poor, both nationally and globally, problems which can only be tackled by radical redistributive policies on wages, taxation and social services.

3. A whole spectrum of views is hereby excluded – ones which reject a campaign for jobs which does not ask "What kind of jobs?", or ones that would deny the ability of redistributive policies, no matter how radical, to remedy innate, systemic defects that make capitalism declare more and more of the population redundant, – and so on.

• 5. Failure to fully implement key aspects of the ACTU/ALP Accord, including effective price control, aspects of tax reform and the social wage, and key elements of economic policy such as industry policy and regulation of financial institutions.

5. Here again a definite tactic is specified, this time towards the Accord: to call for its full implementation. This excludes from the debate those views which, for example, see the Accord as an Australian version of the neo-corporatist "solution" to capitalism's ills – familiar from the European experience in particular. From these excluded perspectives, the Accord was designed to achieve what it has in fact achieved: the reduction of real wages, the neglect of the welfare population and the reliance for recovery on increasing profitability in the private sector. These views include, at one pole, those who advocate a simple return to wage pressure by those groups strong enough to do it; but the critics of a "full implementation" tactic are by no means confined to this particular wing. However, all are equally put "beyond the pale" by the formulation here, which simply assumes in advance the tactic that discussion will arrive at.

• 6. The need to further develop the labour movement's Accord strategy through which labour effectively intervenes on the production side as well as distribution, on the social wage as well as the industrial wage, and on economic and industry planning and industrial democracy as well as immediate work-place concerns.

6. This further emphasises the "full implementation" strategy, and leaves no room for those who are dubious about the present achievements, and query the likely potential, of the kinds of "intervention" mentioned. Once again, the outcome of the discussion is assumed.

● 7. The need for more resolute education and action to overcome the social disadvantages of women and the attitudes which accompany and give rise to discrimination against them.

7. While this formulation agrees with those who see the problem simply in terms of a more equal participation of women in the structure of existing society, it ignores those views which – whether from a socialist or a radical feminist perspective – stress the inbuilt limitations on the progress possible inside existing structures, and the need for a strategy going beyond them.

We cannot expect disagreement on final perspectives to disappear in such a conference, but it should not be impossible – given good will all around – to arrive at plans of action which take all views into account. But this will not occur if a significant body of opinion is simply wished away.

● 8. The re-emergence of racism, coupled with cutbacks on already-limited services for the specific needs of migrant workers and ethnic minorities. These threaten the fragile concept and practice of multiculturalism, with its goal of equal opportunities for migrant workers and ethnic minorities to fully participate in Australian society and to maintain and develop their own cultures and language.

8. Like point (7), the formulation here implicitly denies the relevance of a strategy consistent with goals of more far-reaching social change.

● 9. Growing concentration of private media ownership and control, and the harmful consequences of this for democratic discussion of social issues.

9. This seems to leave out of account those who would not agree that the main concern here should be the growth in concentration – people who would, for example, be critical of the inherent structure of communications in this society and advocate a strategy aimed at combatting it, rather than one designed simply to prevent it from becoming even worse. This is by no means just a question of analysis unrelated to action; the “Community Communications” movement in the U.S.A., for example, has ideas and practice to offer here.

● 10. Increasing multinational and national pressures to cut back the public sector at Federal, State and Local levels, and to privatise public enterprises such as Telecom, TAA and the Commonwealth Bank.

10. The views overlooked here include those who would query, not just the correctness but also the tactical prospects, of a campaign aimed at defending the public sector, in its present form and functioning, against privatisation. Many would deny the utility of such a campaign, if not integrated with demands for changes needed to make the phrase “public sector” more of a reality – by attacking, for example, the present

constraints that require it to serve the private sector.

● 11. The co-ordinated and widespread assault on education by conservative forces seeking a narrow, authoritarian and uncritical schooling process, together with effective pressures to cut back promised government funds for public education while appeasing wealthy private interests.

11. This again sketches out a defence of existing structures, this time within the educational sphere, and ignores the significant body of opinion critical of those structures and dubious of tactics that implicitly accept them.

● 12. The growing need for discussion and action towards a society which provides adequate material wellbeing to all while conserving the environment and resources for further generations.

12. The confinement of goals to material well-being, and the “conservation” theme, give short shrift to those who would argue that basically different perspectives must now be on the agenda. These would include, for instance, those who lay primary stress on quality of life, or contest the validity of consumerist values. The “conservation” outlook is seen as fundamentally flawed by such schools as the social ecologists, who criticise it as simply designed to perpetuate into the foreseeable future harmful practices based on the “domination of nature”. Surely such contributions from the ecological movements should not be ruled out in advance.

● 13. And finally, the increasingly tense and dangerous international situation which affects domestic issues and Australia’s future.

13. By focussing on the “increasingly tense and dangerous” developments, this formulation seems to follow media practice in presenting the threat to humanity’s future in terms of newsworthy items (summit conferences, the latest weapon, etcetera). Other views locate the danger rather in the steady and unspectacular build-up in species-destroying weapon stockpiles, and in the accepted criteria for nation-state behaviour, which between them create the conditions needed for catastrophe sooner or later, irrespective of the current headline situation.

To sum up: it seems to us that the draft Statement cannot be considered a suitable document for the launching of a broad left conference, as it in fact reflects a too-specific and unsuitably narrow complex of views on the major issues, and thus excludes bodies of left thought which are entitled to representation.

Please note that we should not be taken as necessarily advocating, either collectively or individually, the alternative views that we draw attention to. We are in agreement, however, that – like the school represented in the draft statement – they are views which constitute a valid part of

left-wing thought, and ones which should be represented in a conference of the breadth required by the present urgent situation.

We have much sympathy with the aim of at least minimising the operations of “raiding parties” from quarters already in possession, as they believe, of the complete truth, and thus having little or no incentive to engage in genuine discussion. However, to make this an *over-riding* consideration would be, we believe, to vitiate the search for balance and breadth. We therefore welcome the proposals in your letter for expansion of the sponsor list.

We would like to mention another circumstance which seems disturbing: the timing of the proposed Conference to coincide with that of the previously-announced “Liffey” (“Getting Together”) Conference of environmental groups and individuals. Although we know of no reason to believe this to be other than an unfortunate coincidence, we would like to know if mutually-agreed timetabling moves (with, perhaps, some joint sessions) have been made, or are under consideration, to minimise the damage from this *de facto* splitting of the radical movement.

If in fact the initial sponsors agree that, to achieve the breadth desired for the conference, the statement should be recast so as to be less confined to the expression of one set of views, we would be glad to associate ourselves with this badly-needed venture. An alternative would perhaps be to make precise the actual function of the draft statement, and clarify whether it is really intended to rule out of order views which do not fall within its rather narrow range.

The Statement in the first brochure has been amended to take account of points raised in this article.



Women and the Broad Left Conference

by Sue Jackson and Anna Kokkinos (Victoria)

A National Broad Left Conference will be held in Sydney over the Easter long weekend. The Conference aims to provide a forum for the broad left to discuss effective responses to current Australian political developments and to the vital

issues of the 1980s and 1990s. This paper is intended to raise issues for discussion at the women's meeting to discuss the Conference in February 1985. It is not an attempt to raise all issues, but we hope it will help in generating discussion as part of a number of pre-Conference discussions taking place.

The Conference will take place in the context of a number of developments in Australian politics:

1. The New Right

In recent years we have seen the emergence of a more extreme and ideologically confident right wing which has launched a new offensive against labour and progressive movements designed to roll back gains made by unions, Aborigines, women, migrants, the gay community, and other progressive social movements. The influence of the new right can be seen in the push for privatisation of community assets and for deregulation of financial institutions. Both of these have massive implications for the economy and for the distribution of wealth within it. On other fronts the new right is active in the re-emergence of old debates around the family and the push towards a greater emphasis on the primacy of the family. The new right has managed to influence not only conservative politicians, but also many in the Labor Party, and has, in many areas, been able to determine the political agenda in Australia.

2. Labor Governments

Labor Governments at both State and Federal levels have significantly changed the nature of political dynamics. The Hawke and Keating leadership has resulted in a shift to the right of the A.L.P. in both the parliamentary and political wings. The question of how to relate to Labor Governments in power has been a major preoccupation and a major source of disagreement within the left.

3. The State of The Left

The left in Australia is at an all-time low. During the last twenty years the left has experienced numerous political differences which have ideologically, politically, socially and culturally divided the left into an array of parties and factional groupings. In the meantime we have seen the development of the women's and other movements outside the traditional left and labour movement. Despite numerous gains the right has maintained an ideological grip on the political, socio-economic and cultural life of Australia. Meanwhile, the left's ability to mobilise and impact on Australian political developments has been hampered by its own internal crises and its inability to come to grips with how to respond to Labor Governments in power.

Some may question the value of the Conference to women. Too often in the

past the left has appeared as male dominated; preoccupied with exclusively male concerns and issues; and willing to relegate women to a secondary role both in terms of theory and practice. The critiques and challenges posed by the women's movement have not been adequately addressed and the left has often insisted on fitting women into concepts, approaches and structures based on male experience. The left has traditionally been most active in the organised labour movement and around predominantly workplace issues. It is important to recognise that many women are outside the workforce and outside the organised labour movement and that new organisational methods are required to mobilise women. Along with the focus on workplace issues has gone a neglect of the areas of so-called private life, the family and sexuality. Progressive mobilisation around these issues is crucial to the building of socialism, especially the kind of socialism which women would want to see.

We believe that it is important that women have a strong presence at the Broad Left Conference because:

- It is expected that some 1000 people from around Australia will participate in the Conference and it is a good opportunity for women to play an active role in raising the concerns of socialist feminists.

- Many of our demands can not be achieved in isolation from the labour movement generally.

- Isolation from the Labour movement results in women's issues being continually marginalised.

- Some gains have been made within the left around women's issues. This is part of that continuing process.

- With the left in such turmoil there is a real opportunity for women to have an input into the form a revitalised left will take. There is the chance to influence the future theoretical direction of the left and to challenge some of the more traditional concepts, assumptions, structures and methods.

- The new emergence of the right poses the very real question of how we fight back.

A meeting has been arranged to allow women to discuss the pros and cons of participating in the Conference and the form that participation should take for maximum effectiveness. We urge all interested women to attend this meeting.

The meeting to discuss women's involvement in the broad left Conference will be held on Saturday, 15th February, 2-5 p.m., 32 Budd Street, Collingwood. Contact Louise 662 3799 (w). N.B. Women who have already decided to attend the Conference should consider registering as soon as possible as numbers may be limited. It may also be wise to start thinking about travel arrangements as transport will be heavily booked at Easter.



Victorian Pre-Conference Meetings

1. THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW RIGHT (Discussion)

Wednesday, 12th February, 1986
7.30 p.m., 32 Budd Street, Collingwood
Contact Tricia Caswell (h) 419 2262.

2. THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE, MIGRANT WORKERS AND MIGRANT MINORITIES (Discussion)

Tuesday, 18th February, 1986
7.00 p.m., 193 Nicholson Street, North Carlton (Democritus House)
Contact George Zangalis (w) 677661/2/3/4.

3. STRATEGIES AND MODELS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND EFFECTIVE LEFT COALITION (Discussion)

Wednesday, 26th February, 1986
7.30 p.m., 32 Budd Street, Collingwood.
Contact Julius Roe (w) 6183667, (h) 4814688

4. THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE, WORKERS TRADE UNIONS AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT (Discussion)

Wednesday, 5th March, 1986
7.00 p.m., 636 Bourke Street, Melbourne
Contact George Koletsis, (h) 4192262

5. ENVIRONMENTAL, PEACE AND NUCLEAR ISSUES (Discussion)

16th February, 1986. 2.00pm to 5.00pm.
Y.W.C.A., Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.
Contact Jonathon Goodfield (w) 6545995

6. WOMEN, WOMEN'S ISSUES AND THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE (Discussion)

Saturday, 15th February, 1986
2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.
32 Budd Street, Collingwood.
Contact Louise Connor on (w) 662 3799

7. DEREGULATION WORKSHOP (Discussion)

Sunday, 9th March, 1986
Contact Graeme Larcombe (h) 489 7730

8. REGIONAL MEETINGS ARE ALSO BEING ORGANISED.

CHILD CARE IS AVAILABLE IF NOTIFIED.
Contact Marie Goonan 4972130



The New Right : Hysteria and Reality

by Tricia Caswell (Victoria)

One of the aims of the Broad Left Conference is to address the issues surrounding "the emergence of a more extreme and ideologically confident right wing". We should all be thoroughly aware that this is a very significant responsibility, not because of the rise of John Howard, his rhetoric and the possibility that he may be our next Prime Minister; but because many, who would sincerely identify with the Left, are moving into ideological territory occupied by self-confessed conservatives. All our Labor governments in their day to day politics and economics, are doing so without any regard for thorough thinking about social change, how it happens, what our goals are, what might be done now. The race to deregulation, uranium mining, the containment of trade unions at the level of corporate, high level negotiations and by anti-union legislation make it difficult to believe that democratising the economy is on the agenda at all. There has been little achievement for women, in the economy and workforce, in power positions, in issues of child rearing and the culture generally.

There are good reasons for Labor's caution and there have been real steps forward. From a tripartite perspective, gains have been made for the intervention of unions in the business of industry and employment and the Accord has afforded some real protection for sections of workers.

International economics and power battles are brutal. There is much pressure on national governments to conform to international economic and cultural standards. However, from the point of view of real advances, of strategies for social and economic justice the simplistic and reactive efforts of Labor governments mean we are all being sold short. With real and effective strategies much more important and effective initiatives could be successful.

Meanwhile, real progress is steadily being made by the right. Underneath the rabid anti-worker rhetoric lies the much more effective rhetoric of (1) new management and work practices aimed at restructuring industry and destabilising unions. These changes have been

happening for some time. They will lead to the undermining of current living standards and the real effectiveness of Trade Unions unless counter strategies are developed. (2) New Right philosophy denigrates the role played by socialism, and uses the authoritarianism, monetarism and privatisation of Reagan and Thatcher to shift the debates to the right.

(3) This ideology reclaims the family as the perfection of welfare and justice, so pressing for less state intervention and more women at the kitchen sink.

(4) The Right's refurbished think tanks in universities and corporations extends the demands for competitive, private enterprise as the way out of some of capital's conundrums. Let's not be fooled by the victory of the South Australian Labor Party over the conservatives' privatisation packages. Much privatisation continues to be achieved.

(5) The furphy of deregulation should also be mentioned. Internationally deregulation is *not* a question of no state regulation, of the pure free play of market forces. It is a matter of regulation in whose interests and by what means. The American economy is well and truly regulated in the interests of its own capital, at least the winning fraction of it.

These few brief points are not indications of despair. The right is absolutely divided in terms of strategy and Labor governments have not been totally seduced into occupying the middle conservative ground. As I've said there has been progress. It's analysis, strategy and unity which we need to get the most of out of these Labor governments, whilst looking elsewhere for more profound insights into how we are to change the world in the longer term.



Socialism and Survival

by John Wishart (South Australia)

Building a more effective Australian left means, in part, expanding our numerical base by involving progressive people who, whilst anti-capitalist in their basic attitudes, do not presently see the relevance or identify with the socialist movement.

Of particular importance is the growing number of people concerned about environmental issues who believe that radical change to our economic and social

system is necessary if an ecologically sustainable society is to be secured.

Many marxists and socialists have displayed an arrogant, dismissive attitude to those who raise ecological issues, especially where these challenge some of the socialist verities. Environmentalists have been variously labelled as lettuce eaters, middle class radicals, hippies and doomdayers. There are parallels here with the reaction which marxists males first gave to feminists who were exploring new and challenging perspectives 10 or 15 years ago.

It is certainly true that many environmentalists need to learn about the socialist movement, about class and how power is wielded under capitalism, but it is equally true that socialists need to learn much more about nature and how the current way we produce things and often what we produce are extremely destructive of the environment.

There is no need for socialist values to be in conflict with ecological values, and in fact, *the potential for an alliance between the reds and greens is good.*

WHY?

First, because it is not possible to secure an environmentally sustainable society under capitalism. The motive force of capitalism – the drive to private accumulation through profit making – is destructive not just for people but for all living things. For example, the woodchip industry takes away jobs from the timber industry *and* destroys forest cover introducing wood diseases, and causing soil erosion on a big scale. Or, the substitution of advanced and centralised methods of power generation eliminates jobs, erodes workers control *and* causes large scale problems of thermal and chemical pollution. (Modern coal and nuclear power.)

Profit is placed before people and before nature. The transnational company is unconcerned about the earth, the sea and the air. They are seen as resources to be exploited just as human beings are seen as a cost of production to be managed. Whilst the profit motive remains a central dynamic of our system the environment will suffer seriously. Individual material self-interest is the antithesis of a mutually supportive community of people and other things in which the health and viability of the whole are paramount.

To date socialists have concentrated much more on how capitalism exploits people than nature, partly because until 20 or 30 years ago the effects on nature were not as clear and the effects on workers were very stark indeed. But there is more to it than this. Along with the capitalists, many socialists have championed the idea of "man conquering nature". They have abhorred the domination which capital exercised over people, but have embraced the idea that progress is to be found by

human domination over the natural world to serve perceived human material and social interests.

Environmentalists have also taken the analysis of the profit motive further in focussing on the question of growth which is also a key objective of capitalism. They have called into question the growth ethic, and the rationality of this as an organising principle of the economy. Economic growth cannot be limitless for our material world is finite. As a global human community we cannot expand indefinitely. There are only so many minerals, so much oxygen, so many fish in the sea. Until 50 or 30 years ago the natural resources of the world seemed so vast as to be almost limitless. But it is now clear that we are reaching some crucial limits, and that more will be reached in the next 50 years.

To mention a few examples:

(a) we are burning non-renewable fossil fuel – stored energy – so fast that the earth's atmosphere cannot cope with the resultant thermal and chemical pollution. Hence acid rain is now an enormous issue in Europe and Canada, destroying large forests and lakes. The climate of the world may also be significantly altered with devastating effects on food production – making the recent East African famines mere curtain raisers to horrific mass starvation.

(b) high technology food production, employing large machines, manufactured fertilisers, weedicides and pesticides and monocultural cropping and grazing, is causing significant problems of soil erosion, desertification, river salinity and the poisoning of the food chain. After damaging the lands of the first and second worlds, we are busy foisting these irrational farming practices on third world countries, thereby destroying their cultures, impoverishing the people and ruining their lands which they had often successfully cared for for thousands of years. Leading the charge are the agri-business multi-nationals and the financial moguls from the World Bank and the IMF who reap great profits from this kind of economic "development".

SECONDLY, *it is not possible to establish worker and community control under capitalism.*

Capitalism robs people of power over their immediate life and work. Socialists have analysed extensively how decision-making in industry is made by management without workers having any real say. Workers neither own the fruits of their labour nor control the work process itself.

Ecologists share this concern and its application in modern industry with such things as de-skilling of trades and crafts, and the centralisation of technical knowledge and innovation remote from the workplace.

Like the young Marx, radical environmentalists have re-raised the issue of alienation both from work and in social

life. Capitalism, in its drive to specialisation and the development of passive consumerism, has gone a long way in destroying the sense of community and control of material objects and surroundings which many civilisations previously enjoyed. Although technical innovations have in some ways freed people for leisure time activities and increased the body of knowledge available to the mass of the people, it has also made us dependent on outside agencies whose services have to be consumed by commercial exchange. The motor car is an outstanding example – now so complicated and expensive that most people are unable to maintain the vehicles themselves. Dependent on the motor car for transport to work and social activities they are at the same time dependent on the motor industry to "survive" in the mass society. The machine is boss. (Of course the other negative aspects of cars on the environment have been frequently mentioned.)

THIRDLY, *the ecological view is global and the socialist perspective is international.*

Although there has been a tendency within the socialist movement to resort to nationalism and the building of socialism in one country, there is a long tradition of international solidarity among peoples and races against world wide imperialism. Radical ecologists are also aware of these things, believing that current poverty in the third world is due to the international economic order and that greater equality across nations is not possible unless big changes occur in the distribution of power and wealth between the so-called "developed" and "undeveloped" nations. Questions of equity loom large whether it be over the use of minerals, food or technological know-how. The vast inequalities are only possible whilst multi-national capital engages in super-exploitation of third world people.

Of course, at times there is a certain "community of interests" between workers/consumers in the west and their capitalist lords *at the expense* of third world brothers and sisters. That is partly why socialists have usually found it difficult to generate real political momentum in the metropolitan countries for liberation movements amongst third world peoples. There is a real problem here, but Australian socialists need not be defensive about this or retreat into economic nationalism. For in the longer term there is *no* community of interests between the classes of the developed countries on this score. Super-exploitation and unbridled environmental degradation – such as the current destruction of the South American forests – will rebound on us all, in time permanently changing the ecological balance on a global scale and leading to dislocation across national and geographical boundaries.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to outline a few basic areas of congruence between the socialist movement and the radical ecology movement, whilst also indicating where environmentalists have developed the analysis further. These areas and others can be used as bridges to effect greater left unity provided that both movements listen and learn from the other.

Socialist countries such as the USSR, China and Cuba have achieved much in liberating their peoples from social and economic systems which meant grinding poverty and personal insecurity. But on the environmental front their track record is far less flattering. Many environmentalists seeing these flaws have concluded that socialism is incompatible with survival and sustainability. There is another interpretation – namely that socialism is necessary but not sufficient for the creation of a sustainable society.

There is no point in the working class coming to power if we then proceed to destroy the world around us, but there is no way that we can establish a sustainable steady state economy under capitalism. As one comrade put it: "We want a socialist society with a human face and an ecological heart".



Environmental Issues and the Broad Left Conference

by Jonathon Goodfield (Victoria)

For many activists working in the environment and anti-nuclear movements, the Broad Left Conference will provide some focus both for much-needed evaluation of their priorities and actions within the framework of the concerns of the traditional left and other social change movements, and for discussion of the differences that exist between the movements in terms of political practice and theory. This interaction will hopefully improve understanding and communication between activists working in different areas, and help develop a broader perspective in all our work.

There are many working within the environment movement who cringe slightly when described as an 'environmentalist' or a 'greenie', knowing that the stereotype of a middle-class hippie concerned only with saving this river or that rainforest and having a naive understanding of political and economic systems, is still strong (and possibly represents many of the people they work with). Yet on the other hand, they feel strongly that the environmental movement has some important lessons for the left in general, in terms of challenging its traditional priorities, theories and organisational structures. These need to be seriously considered, if the involvement of the environment movement in the broad left is to be anything more than a token gesture, another issue to be tacked onto a long list of 'concerns'.

From those on the left, too, there is an increasing awareness of the need to take into account the analysis that has developed from the green movement. The development of environmentally sound economic policies, and the push for socially useful production and occupational health, for example, might in part be in response to growing awareness of the threats of pollution and resource depletion to human survival. In some ways, the green movement has served to perhaps remind socialists of their roots in nineteenth century agrarian utopias.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the Broad Left Conference has coincided with the Getting Together Conference; the attention of many environmental activists will be divided between the two meetings. It is therefore important that some pre-Easter discussion on environmental issues and the left is undertaken. The Melbourne organising group for the Broad Left is holding a meeting on this theme on Sunday, 16th February at 2.00 p.m. at the YWCA, 489 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. For further information, and suggestions for the agenda, please contact Jonathon Goodfield: (03) 489 6168 (h); (03) 654 5995 (w).



Fundraising in
Victoria
**Barbecue –
March 16**

The newly appointed Victorian organiser for the Broad Left Conference, Marie Goonan, is planning a number of fund-raising events. The first one planned is to be a fun barbecue on Sunday, March 16, 12 noon onwards. The place is the park in Elliott Avenue, Parkville (opposite the Melbourne Zoo, near the tramline, Melways map 2A, J2). Tickets are \$10 each, meat and salad included, BYOG. Contact Marie on (03) 497 2130 (home).



Improving practical co-operation between all sections of the Progressive movement should be the chief focus of the Conference

by David Ross (Newcastle)

Agreement on action around issues will work to ideologically unite. Conversely, attempts to impose or unify the widely diverse philosophies of the progressive movements through ideological debates in large conferences in my experience, is divisive, and should be avoided.

The idea for workshops is good, and will allow for more specific exchanges of experience and new ideas. However, the degree of the workshop's success will depend on well thought through proposals that are realistic in the immediate, transitional and long term sense. Lengthy re-statements of how bad capitalism is, and generalised exhortations to 'unite the working class', for capitalism's inevitable overthrow, only underline the political impotence of the left.

The conference should be a starting point for national co-ordination and expansion of successful strategies already developed in particular movements and in particular local areas and regions.

A major concern for me however, is how we can raise our own level of political understanding of the divisive class nature of the consumer state, whose given answer to Australia's (or the world's for that matter) economic and social problems is to flog off faster our irreplaceable natural resources, usually in the most ecologically irresponsible manner.

Unfortunately the consumerist values underlying this mentality are deeply implanted in the working class in our country. I believe a similar values dilemma is also alive and well in the socialist based economies, from 25 to 68 years after their revolutions.

Two results of this dilemma are firstly, mass preoccupation and competition in

the acquisition of the unnecessary; and secondly mass non-participation in the main political processes that determine the quality and nature of our society.

The 'Greens' in West Germany have had some success in attempting to tackle this complex question. They have shown the potential of mass support for a more self-sufficient, socially and environmentally equitable society. Other small examples abound in many countries, including Australia.

If there is to be a future for socialism in Australia, and for this planet's human survival, we must discard one-dimensional strategies that on one hand ignore the class nature of political power, or on the other, ignore the fact that we are all on a rapidly depleting single survival system; earth.



Unions and the Broad Left Conference

by George Koletsis (Victoria)

The situation in Victoria is that in my opinion the Trade Unions are developing a more individualistic approach and forgetting the dictum of the trade union movement that "unity is strength".

As a younger participant in the Trade Union movement it's often difficult to find the balance of the Old and New Guard. I respect the old traditions, but also find some real sense in some propositions put by the Newer Guard. We must accept discussion on all issues and not simply reject proposals which have not been assessed.

Also there is the dream some people have of competing against other unions for something better for their union alone. In many cases this means forgetting the rest. This, in effect is supporting capitalist competition, and does not score any points in the left.

For the Broad Left Conference to be successful there must be an amalgum of political groupings and trade unions.

Representation at the Conference should be from all parts of the left spectrum. However I am hopeful on the basis of comments from comrades that this conference will be truly representative.

Openness and sincerity must apply if we are to make any gains. The options available are:

(1) To continue to fragment and move along individualistic paths, compete amongst ourselves and different political affiliations.

(2) To unite, have dialogue and work together identifying the problems confronting the union movement and the left; developing campaigns that have got the potential for rallying maximum support from the whole trade union movement and other progressive forces.

We need to become comrades against the repressive forces of the employers and the right which has once again raised its head like a cobra out of its basket, ready to attack the ill-prepared and rather sick trade union movement.

Let's see all progressive people participate in debate both at the Conference and pre-Conference discussions to develop the left.



A Left View of the ACTU/ALP Accord

by Pat Clancy (New South Wales)

Spokespersons for the various employer organisations bitterly attack the Accord and oppose its implementation in national wage cases. Representatives of the most reactionary business and political circles attack it in Parliament and in the media.

The last ACTU Congress of 1250 delegates representing 2.6 million unionists were unanimous in its adoption, not a single voice was raised in opposition.

However, discussion among active militant unionists show that there are some who have misgivings about the correctness of the Accord tactic.

Some confuse the Accord with the "Social Contract" between the British trade union movement, the Wilson Government and the employers. That tripartite arrangement was a clear example of class collaboration which imposed an arbitrary ceiling on wage movements and did not give wage increases to all workers. The Accord is a two way agreement

between the Labor Party and the ACTU and does not include the employers.

This confusion is seized upon by the Trotskyite and other sectarian left forces.

The Accord tactic was first adopted unanimously at a meeting of trade union activists open to all Left forces held in Melbourne in February, 1983.

The conclusion that must be drawn is that the organised Left in Australia regards the Accord as a document providing the best possibility for developing the class struggle in the particular circumstances now prevailing in Australia.

The Accord is a wide-ranging document which covers essential questions such as the maintenance of the real value of wages, the improvement of the workers' economic conditions in accordance with increased productivity, the introduction of taxation reforms aimed to benefit the lower and middle income earners, the introduction of an industry policy by the government which aims at tackling the serious unemployment problem, improvements in social service standards and the social wage.

It should be remembered that for two years prior to the Accord being introduced, centralised wage fixing had been abandoned under the Fraser Government policy.

For that period of time there existed an opportunity in practice to test the view held by some that workers' living standards were best served by their ability to wring from employers improvements outside of any centralised system.

The facts are that during that period the average worker's wages was reduced in real terms by almost 10%.

That part of the gross domestic product going to employers' profits increased to the highest percentage for some 20 years and the overall numbers of people living on amounts less than the agreed-upon poverty level increased dramatically.

A basic aim behind trade union policy is to unite the whole trade union movement in national wage campaigns which benefit every worker, not merely those who are organised in the economically well-placed industries.

Defending and extending the immediate interests of the workers by means of the Accord and other processes while also consistently campaigning for the socialist objective of the Australian labor movement is fully in line with the long term interests of trade unionists.

In the period since the Accord came into being, there have been four national wage increases which with one exception have applied to all workers.

In November 1984, the first taxation reform was introduced which meant an average of about eight dollars per week in income for the average worker.

Pensions and other social service payments were also adjusted with changes in the costs of living figures and each six months' pensions have been

increased in accordance with the inflation figures. However more needs to be done by the trade union movement to assist the Pensioner movement in the campaign to lift pensions to 25% of the average weekly wage.

Industry Committees have been established with trade union participation with the aim of directing government policy towards stimulating employment in a range of industries. An additional 500,000 jobs had been achieved as a result.

The real issue for the left is how to utilize the Accord in the ongoing class struggle.

This requires of the left that it works more vigorously to assess those areas where the government has neglected its responsibilities established in the Accord, and develop united campaigns for its further implementation.

An example of this approach was the struggle by the Commonwealth Public Servants in early 1985 when they engaged in militant activities in support of their wages demands.

Another example is the campaign in support of the claim in October, 1985, that all wages be increased by 3.8% which were the then CPI figures.

The employers' organisations bitterly opposed the unions' claim with their representatives in Parliament attacking the Government for its support.

This policy was adopted by the employers despite the many high profit figures which were announced.

The employers were unable to defeat the combined efforts of the union movement and the Government and workers received the 3.8% rise, which meant a 10 to 12 dollars a week increase.

The Accord is also being used as a weapon in the campaign to win a 3% productivity rise in the form of superannuation schemes.

While the Arbitration Court still maintains a basic employer class position it has been unable to prevent the trade union movement from extending wage gains to all workers through this centralised system.

The employing class are bitterly opposed to this policy and are seeking to again deregulate the wages system as a means of weakening the workers' strength.

The Accord has thus become an instrument to fight against this employer policy of wages deregulation.

No doubt some right-wing forces in the ALP would like to see the Accord used as a means of hamstringing the unions.

The question of whether right-wing forces can misuse the Accord depends upon how the left and militant forces of the labour movement demand that the Accord be applied for positive policies and programmes in the workers' interest.

Those in the Left who concentrate their attention upon the wages question alone when speaking or writing about the Accord are little better than the

economists who were subject to trenchant criticism by Lenin in the earlier part of this century for trying to restrict the unions to narrow economic issues.

Many militant active campaigns have been developed by a range of unions.

The include:

- The broadly based people's struggle for acceptable taxation reform.
- The miners' struggle against pit closures.
- The Victoria railway workers' struggle also for job security.
- Nurses national campaigning to improve their job standards and preserve public health.

The existence of the Accord has not prevented the trade union movement from engaging in struggle against the employers or the Labor Government – (i.e. the struggle against the broad based Tax issue; opposition for entry of foreign banks; deregulation of financial institutions; removal of ceiling on interest on home loans).

On the vital question of peace, the trade union movement is united and has engaged in considerable activities.

In the field of trade union rights in the struggle against repressive anti-union legislation there have been many struggles.

Reading some of the statements issued by the Trotskyite and sectarian left, the impression could be gained that the Accord is the main enemy and all efforts must be directed at destroying the unanimously made decision of the Australian trade union movement.

Almost every problem is attributed to the Accord by these forces, with very little analysis being directed towards the real enemy – the national and international monopoly forces.

We should remember that our society is a capitalist society, with the real power residing in the hands of monopoly whose policy is to crush the organised working class forces and impose a programme of intensified exploitation upon working people.

One has only to look at the policies being carried out by reactionary circles in other capitalist countries to see the effect of these plans. In no other capitalist country has the working class won four national wage increases in the past two years. This experience has shown that the way the trade union movement is insisting that the Accord be applied does work in the interests of the Australian workers.

The role of the left in these circumstances is to build the unity of the trade union movement to an even higher level, not to attack and attempt to undermine the declared policy of the trade union movement but to work in common with all forces in the trade union movement to see that the positive features of the Accord are carried out by the Government.



The Broad Left Conference: Strategies, Tactics and Action for Industrial Democracy and Social Responsibility

by Max Bound and Dain Bolwell (Tasmania)

The issues of what the Broad Left Conference should be about – and to whom it should be open – are important ones.

We decided to become sponsors on the understanding that the discussions will be broadly based around the initial sponsors' statement.

The likely character and level of those discussions and the assumptions the participants start from, are of considerable concern. An open conference would deny potential participants the right to prior knowledge about what sort of a conference they are to attend.

Participants will need to be thoughtful about their own contributions and prepared to forego discussions on some issues in order to allow adequate consideration of others. The statement provides a guide to the issues to be discussed. For example, the conference will include people who have quite different views as to whether a political party to the left of the ALP is necessary.

To make an issue of this important matter would be to destroy an opportunity to work out generally applicable approaches to developing left strategies and tactics.

We believe a new left political party formation is necessary – but that is not an issue for this Easter Conference.

Strategies, tactics and actions for industrial democracy and a social responsibility in productive, commercial and other activities are issues of importance. The Accord needs to be evaluated in this context. The right have a view about it – as do the centre. A few on the left blame the Accord for wage and other restrictions on the unions, and for increased profits. This view fails to

recognise the power of the corporations and their control of markets.

A view more generally held by people on the left is – the Accord can be a useful arrangement within which the struggle for basic working class aims can be pursued. The concentration of capital, the power of the corporations and the overall position of the working class are the important issues. In our view a slanging match about whether or not the Accord should be scrubbed needs to be avoided. Discussion on the Accord should be in the context of its effects on the issues above.



The Broad Left Conference: Why women should go and what they should do when they get there

by Tricia Caswell (Victoria)

Once again in history, it's difficult to map progress for women. On the one hand, questions of equality and rights have been tabled for the society as a whole. Most Australians, one guesses, have been in contact with parts of the debates. 38% of our workforce is women, and it's expected that more women will enter the workforce. On the other hand, women in Australia still earn only 66.6% of what men earn, on average; and the jobs they are entering are still the dreadful ones.

The issues that go to the core of women's oppression are: (1) childbirth and childrearing; (2) unpaid domestic labour; (3) the cultural predispositions that remain; making women accept their lot and men paranoid about loss of power.

Feminists and socialists have tried to get together many times. The debates in the Russian revolution are not unlike those we continue to have. We have, however, not succeeded in integrating these central

issues for women in the skirmishes about authentic socialism and how to get there.

If the Conference is to be a place for inspiration, innovation and progress for the left, these questions must be an absolute priority. There is little point talking about the economy, economic justice and industry development unless we are speaking about the future positions of women as equals in all of it. There is no point talking about new industrial strategies for trade unions unless women's participation and the changes needed to guarantee that participation are confronted. Over the last decade or so 73% of new union members have been women. It is a danger for women and the future of the trade union movement if this is ignored.

What is paramount is that equality for women means changes for men that are cultural and economic. But changes that can be welcomed. Both women and men could be living much more varied, richer, emotional and political lives if ideological and economic production, child rearing and unpaid domestic labour were genuinely shared. The women's movement is now too important and active to tolerate going backwards.

The point is for the left, who so often acts like the right in matters of feminism, to honestly address these issues, not to ignore them. Women must go to the Conference, and actively participate in everything!



Socialist Feminism and the Broad Left Conference

by Jane Martin (N.S.W.)

The Broad Left Conference presents an opportunity for Australia's left to collectively evaluate its political analysis, practice and position, both in the Australian and international context.

As part of this process socialist feminists will also be re-evaluating our analysis,

practice and position as part of the left and in the above context.

Socialist feminists are politically active in the industrial sector, the public sector, the community welfare sector – paid and unpaid, as well as being active in the environmental movement, the anti-nuclear disarmament and peace movements, the lesbian and gay movements, campaigns for racial equality, the trade union movement and the women's liberation movement.

The intersections between these areas of work are both crucial and complex. By necessity we carry many contradictions in our work on class, race and gender politics.

The development of analysis and practice that confronts class, race and gender inequality often requires complex prioritizing of political objectives and strategies within the struggle for socialist change. Historical and contemporary economic and social factors and the intersections, congruence and contradictions, between class, race and gender politics are fundamental determinants in how we work at any given time, in any given campaign for socialist change. These contradictions, our political priorities and strategies, our position in the Australian international context, again warrant collective discussion and debate.

Socialist feminists have been both successful and unsuccessful in developing political practice which reflects class, gender and race equality consciousness in the labour movement, the women's liberation movement, etc. We have made a huge impact on the ideological position of women in Australia and much less impact on the institutional-economic position of women in this country.

Whilst women are the most marginalized group of workers in terms of their relative position re wages and conditions, women represent the most significant group of new members in the trade union movement.

Women's employment is still subject to last hired, first fired syndrome, wage equality still lags by 44%, the Federal Labor Government has recently instituted a savage attack on women's right to work through its cuts to childcare funding and women's economic dependence on men is institutionally bound by the "breadwinner ideology" still fundamental in the social security and taxation system.

In Sydney and Melbourne socialist feminists are holding pre-conference discussions to ensure that our position is not marginalized at the Broad Left Conference. Other cities and regional centres are urged to do so also.

Sydney meeting of socialist feminists to be held on *Saturday, 22nd February, 2-5 pm* at the *Inner City Education Centre, 37 Cavendish Street, Stanmore*. Please phone Jane Martin, 264 3696, for further details or if child care is required.

Melbourne meeting: Saturday, 15th February, 2-5 pm, 32 Budd Street, Collingwood. Please phone Louise 662 3799 (wk) for more information or if child care is required.



A Summary of the Paper – Left Strategies

by Max Bound and other Tasmanian sponsors

Five Tasmanian sponsors of the B.L.C. have circulated a discussion paper to all National sponsors. The following is a summary of some ideas canvassed in the paper.

Inequalities will increase in Australia as living standards for large numbers deteriorate. Irresponsible increases in production accompany large-scale destruction of food and other goods. Capacity to produce increases whilst the capacity of tens of millions throughout the world to gain access to essential needs are shrinking. Resource destruction threatens present and future generations. These realities generate a need for more holistic approaches to developing strategies in the struggle for a human future.

An analysis which brings together the past, the present and the desired future in a way which is comprehensible to people involved in immediate struggles has not been adequately developed by the left. There is a need to bring together class and feminist analysis.

Rights and liberties are under increasing attack and the threat of a nuclear holocaust hangs over us all.

The effects of the destructive anti-social ideas of the ruling class are widespread, but in a basic sense people are inherently humanistic and *given a chance* prefer to be co-operative and constructive. Progress is not inevitable and fascism could win.

Despite very real problems workers and their unions *have a potential* to become the leading *mass force* in struggle for a future in which people control their own lives. Union support for social, economic, environmental, civil liberties issues and movements, including equal rights for women in all aspects of society, and the peace movement are essential.

Parliament is important, and increasing a left presence is essential – but real power resides elsewhere. The right control the establishment and forces of coercion – economic, legal, social, propaganda, etc. The left needs mass support, a mass movement, changes in mass consciousness and mass participation if the current destructive thrusts of economic and social life are to be turned in a more positive direction.

Given such changes, democracy would be strengthened and Parliament would be less subject to those who control capital and its establishment.

For the left, co-operation and co-ordination are essential but there can also be strength in diversity. We should not seek to create a monolith. The contradiction between the need of the main-stream media to appear relatively unbiased and its essential part in the processes of controlling people's minds, needs to be understood and opportunities utilised.

People respond to a multitude of issues and the left needs to increase its input to influencing those responses. A variety of different backgrounds and experiences affect responses. The general experience is of a lifetime of exposure to indoctrination in the basic ideas and values of the ruling class.

"Union consciousness, even class consciousness is not always and not necessarily also social and political consciousness. Some union conscious workers, often dependent upon who they work with, are less racist than is the general public. However, sexist ideas frequently run deep and alongside of the positive humanistic aspects of their consciousness..."

"Sexist ideas frequently exclude women from male union solidarity. Racist ideas and complacency about the poverty and suffering of other people in Australia and in other countries exclude aborigines and others from the concept of solidarity."

The Australian worker unionist is not perfect but like others is a product of capitalist society. In general terms, the working class, excepting for those very highly paid sections of it, are less corrupted by capitalist ideas than other sections of society.

What we are concerned to raise here is the potential for co-operation between unionists and other exploited people; the underlying ideas or ideologies which can either help or hinder this co-operation..."

There are 'soft edges' to ruling class control. The current attack on living

standards and the expectations of large numbers of people needs to be met with rational explanation of how and why such cuts are harmful to the economy as well as to people. This explanation needs to be presented in the context of positive alternative approaches which challenge current orthodoxies. Unions should be encouraged to argue from the point of view of 'the public' rather than only self interest.

"Action for social progress requires firstly, the defence and advancement of workers' interests as a class. These interests include centralised wage fixing rather than high wages for a minority and low wages for the poorly organised and those in non-strategic industries. Equal pay for equal work. Workers and union involvement in economic planning and decision-making. The Accord between the unions and the Federal Labor Government is an avenue which can help in furthering the struggles on these and other issues."

Secondly, the union movement has a responsibility to other people's movements and should help provide resources and an important mass base in other democratic movements..."

Forward economic planning and making decisions about resources for industry research and other vital economic questions in a time framework which enables union members to be consulted, are necessary. Worker participation which by-passes unions, leaves workers powerless. Access to information and developing worker/union capacities in terms of back-up resources and worker expertise in the above areas which are new to workers and unions, must be part of the processes of democratising industry, commerce and the work place.

The paper points up the social inefficiency of capitalism. Real weaknesses and problems in the public sector are noted, as is the need for democratisation. Supporters of capitalism malign and lie about the public sector and try to hide the fact that it props up an otherwise unsustainable system.

"Perhaps the greatest piece of misrepresentation and falsehood about the public sector is the inference that it is a costly appendage, with no real part in wealth production. It is the public sector which provides the services already mentioned, plus train services, airports, port facilities, power, communication satellites and finds facilities for, as well as paying for, actual research on behalf of private enterprise. These services are with few exceptions, provided cheaply or for nothing and enable private enterprise to function."

It is not unusual that public enterprises cannot be profitable. Telecom is, despite its provision of services to uneconomic areas. The problem is that the public sector has been designated the role of

unpaid or grossly underpaid nursemaid to private enterprise..."

Other questions discussed in the paper include – the causes of war; some issues facing the peace movement; the social audit concept; and the future of work.



A First Response

THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE: A FIRST RESPONSE

by Jeff Richards (South Australia)

This Conference is a welcome opportunity for us to discuss the current problems that confront socialists in Australia. We live in a time when the labour movement has made significant gains through the election of ALP governments federally and in the states. The process by which we can extend those advances will be at the centre of all the debates and discussions leading up to and during the Conference.

EXCLUDING AND INCLUDING

At the meeting on November 8 a heated discussion arose about whom we should include and exclude from the Conference. The idea of excluding anyone claiming to be a socialist presents more problems than it solves. If a member of the centre left is excluded from the Conference because he/she is called a right winger, or because they are a traitor to the labour movement, then we could find that such epithets thrown with frivolous abandon at many other comrades. It would be a tragic situation if the accusers suddenly found themselves the accused.

What if someone were to move a motion saying that all those who advocated a special wage for young people were nothing more than a pack of traitors to the young unemployed. One

might conceivably exclude comrades to the left of the centre left. What if a motion were moved condemning all those who supported the submarine project as nothing more than a bunch of imperialist war mongers bent on assisting the continued subjugation of the people of South East Asia. One might even exclude more people than who are to the left of the centre left. What if a motion were moved against all those who did not openly condemn the Bannon Government's cynical abandonment of its anti-uranium policy. What if someone in a foolish moment were to call for the exclusion of such people because they were just a withered bunch of left posers more interested in their positions than their principles. Such a struggle could go on endlessly and would waste our time.

It would also be detrimental for us to exclude people on the left because of the fear of a "takeover" or because they oppose the ALP/ACTU Accord. One of the most important discussions at the Conference will be to weigh up the value of the Accord to the socialist project. To exclude the participation of comrades who oppose the Accord would be to the detriment of the discussion.

Providing comrades are willing to observe the proper rules of debate and discussion, then they should have the chance to put forward their point of view, before the Conference, during the Conference and after the Conference.

THE CONFERENCE CALL

I regard the Conference call as a starting point for discussion. To assume that it is a fixed document would negate the whole process of discussion leading up to the Easter weekend. I feel that is necessary for us to be ready to go beyond the call in formulating a response to the ascendancy of an extreme right in Australian politics. Let me give an example of one point on the call that I feel is worth a re-examination.

"The need to further develop the labour movement's Accord strategy through which labour effectively intervenes on the production side as well as the distribution, on the social wage as well as the industrial wage, and on economic and industry planning and industrial democracy as well as immediate workplace concerns."

Some Questions:

1. Does the "Accord strategy" need to be developed or does it need to be abandoned altogether?

2. Has the Accord allowed the working class to strengthen its position in society? Has it improved the overall standard of living? Has it increased labour's share of the national product?

3. Has the Accord strategy allowed unions to fight for a "social wage"? Have the living and working conditions of women improved significantly under the

Accord, or will it be necessary for women to escape the constraints of the Accord to increase their power and influence in society.

4. To what extent have the conditions of the unemployed improved under the "Accord strategy"? How involved have unions become in fighting for the interests of the unemployed since Labor won government federally? Unemployment and the threat of unemployment is the most important instrument that the ruling class uses to hold back the demands of workers under a liberal democracy. Yet it would seem that this is one of the most neglected issues in the labour movement.

5. Has the Accord allowed us to protect the trade union movement from attack? The connivance of the Government and the ACTU in the destruction of the Builders' Laborers' Federation is one of the most scandalous in the history of the Australian labour movement. Gone are the days of "an injury to one is an injury to all". We ought to be asking ourselves if this "Accord strategy" has facilitated that connivance. Similarly, the SEQEB dispute in Queensland and the rather faint-hearted response of the union movement towards it should also come under our scrutiny.

6. Under the social wage also comes the standard of living of Aboriginal people, pensioners, newly arrived migrants from places such as Vietnam and Chile. Has the trade union movement been fighting for those people under the "strategy of the Accord".

DISARMAMENT, IMPERIALISM AND AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The participation of the left in the peace movement is another area of discussion at the Conference. The peace movement has represented one of the greatest mobilisers of concerned people over the last few years. It is a forum from which we can openly put forward our ideas and convince people about our views without using takeover tactics and exclusion. One of the areas that many of us (myself included) have neglected to pursue is the role Australia plays in the system of imperialist domination in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia's military role in the Asia-Pacific region is quite large. We provide military assistance to some of the most repressive dictatorships in South-East Asia. We ought to be asking what economic and strategic interests Australia has in pursuing its present foreign policy.

Just because the peace movement in its official policy does not agree to campaign against Australia's foreign policy does not mean that we in the left should neglect it. The elevation of the submarine project to a sacred cow in the South Australian

election campaign and the silence of a large part of the left over it should really lead us to ask if questions of expediency have completely overcome our political principles.

The victory of the right in Australian society will begin with our surrender to the forces of conservatism within our own ranks. Part of that surrender includes our failure to confront those forces openly and publicly. The paradox of exclusion of the various currents in the labour movement will be to facilitate that surrender. If we have got something to say, then let's say it openly and without fear. Leave all the police dogs in the labour movement to rot in hell.



The Need for Unified Action on Contemporary Issues

by Jack Cambourn (New South Wales)

Radical workers often raise the point as to when the left are "... going to get their act together". It's a common expression that one hears. I believe that this comes from a feeling of concern as to the lack of a coherent left view on a range of topics to do with economic, social, political, environmental, and peace issues.

I believe that those workers (plus others) will have an expectation that the Broad Left Conference will produce some concrete proposals as to the strategies around which all sections of the left can act together. They would see the Conference therefore as a unifying Conference for future action around specific issues and demands.

Having said that I propose that an agenda item could be –

What concrete steps on contemporary issues is it possible for the Broad Left Conference to initiate.



Some thoughts on the Conference Program

by Jim Levy (New South Wales)

With reference to the program for the Broad Left Conference, I refer to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of November 15, 1985 which contains the following paragraph –

Average weekly ordinary time earnings for adults in full-time employment rose by 1.6 per cent in the September quarter, to \$388.80.

A crisis of the Australian working class this does not make! Of course too many workers do not command these wages, but that is not the point. The fact is that for an enormous number of workers capitalism is working and it is not in crisis.

It is a truism that the masses somehow come to socialism as a result of the objective circumstances. A large number of activists did *not* come to socialism because of poverty, illiteracy, poor health, lack of opportunity ... oppression. Rather, many have become socialists because of moral and ethical considerations. Our parents taught us to share, or the Church taught us to sacrifice, or we learned that cooperation actually works.

Another problem: just how do we define a worker these days? Does worker mean a blue collar male working on the shop floor for a wage somewhere near \$388 a week and in a union which protects him? Is the worker a migrant female taking in sewing at home with no knowledge of the union movement and less interest in it? Am I a worker? It is obvious that the growth of the service industries and the decline of manufacturing, along with the considerable affluence of Australian society, render easy definitions of worker and of working class very difficult.

What is the relationship between these observations? Briefly, Australian socialism must confront realistically the degree to which Australian capitalism has succeeded. It helps to explain why the socialist parties have lost membership, why it is difficult to sustain the ideological debates of the period 1930-1950. Memories of the Depression and the common front during WWII are fast fading as one generation replaces another. The relevance of socialism to Australian society is indeed open to question.

If we believe that objective circumstances are the basis for the development of a socialist consciousness, then we must accept the fact that we're in for a hard time.

Where does this leave us? If I knew the answers ... But it should not leave us carping at one another for failing to develop the mass movement, or even to stop the rot. It means accepting that fact that until or unless those objective circumstances change radically, socialism will remain irrelevant to most Australians. It means that we must hang in there doing what we can to achieve justice when and where possible, and to work hard on articulating a sensible vision of a socialist Australia so that when capitalism's crisis actually does create the objective circumstances, the movement is able to provide leadership. In order to hang in there and to be ready we must, above all, work to maintain socialism as a *legitimate* word in the Australian vocabulary. I am terrified that in the crisis fascism might well defeat socialism.

What about the program for the Conference? If we are to bring together the Broad Left, we must:

1. devote a panel or a workshop to analysing from a socialist perspective the successes of Australian capitalism;
2. devote a workshop to defining the socialist constituency and the worker;
3. devote a workshop or seminar to formulating proposals on how to get the message across, how to insure that socialism remains a legitimate word in the Australian political lexicon.



Queensland Report

The Queensland Sub-Committee of the Broad Left Conference Sponsors and Supporters has met a number of times since Xmas.

While the Conference has broad support in this State, the Sub-Committee feels that steps should be taken to enlist the support of a full range of individuals working in different areas of struggle throughout Queensland. To this end, individuals in the black community, the gay community, the environmental movement, the migrant community, the academic community, the progressive

church groupings, the peace community, the Coalition for Democratic Rights/The Queensland School, the rural community, progressive groups in the professions, and the women's movement are being approached to participate in and support the Conference.

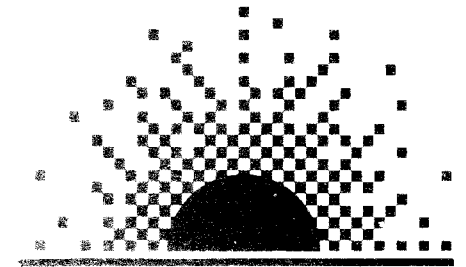
MARCH 8 SEMINAR

A seminar is to be held on Saturday 8th March, 1986, in order to compile a theme and agenda for Queensland contributions to the N.B.L.C. It is not envisaged that Queensland (or any other State) attend the N.B.L.C. as a bloc but rather as a grouping of individuals all working in different areas of left activities.

REGIONAL CENTRES

The Convening Committee suggests that interested persons in various centres could be brought together to form a group or organisation to facilitate participation by as broad a spectrum as possible.

That Convening Committee is composed of: Peter O'Brien, Wallace Trohear, Garrett Purtil, David Ettershank, Don Brown, Judith Wigchert.



The Getting Together Conference

The Getting Together Conference is to be held at the University of N.S.W. on the Easter weekend. Environmentalists, a number of sympathetic alternative lifestyle groups, and those representing Aboriginal land rights, gay rights, the women's movement are involved. It is hoped that effective exchange of participants and ideas will take place between the two Conferences. A combined social event is to be planned for the Saturday night.

THE BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE

Easter 1986

NSW Institute of Technology, Broadway, Ultimo, Sydney

(opposite Carlton Brewery, near Central Station)

