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**SMASH THE ALP / LIBERALS ATTACK
ON LOW-INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS!**

**DON'T GET SUCKED INTO SUPPORTING ANY
OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES:
LET'S INSTEAD GET POLITICALLY PREPARED TO
FIGHT FOR WORKING CLASS PEOPLE'S RIGHTS!**

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF FRIENDLY NORTH KOREA

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*Cover: Children at play at the Chang Gwang Kindergarten,
Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK), August 2012.*



Heroes face court. Some of the, over 150, refugees arrested over the July uprising in Nauru, face court. Nearly all the 540 asylum seekers imprisoned in Nauru took part in the struggle which saw the hellhole detention complex burn to the ground (below). The Australian Left and trade union movement must call for the immediate dropping of all charges against the arrested refugees and for the granting of immediate asylum to them and all the other asylum seekers. The Australian workers movement could do well with the injection of people with the audacity and defiance as those who participated in the courageous July 2013 Nauru resistance struggle.



SMASH RUDD'S RACIST SCHEME! **IMMEDIATE ASYLUM IN AUSTRALIA** **FOR ALL REFUGEE ARRIVALS!**

July 20 – Many of us know that Liberal shadow immigration minister Scott Morrison is whipping up hardline racism against refugees. Yesterday, ALP Prime Minister Kevin Rudd totally trumped him. Rudd yesterday announced a scheme that is considerably worse than anything the racist Howard regime ever implemented and more extreme than what Abbott's right-wingers have up till now been proposing. Under the Rudd plan, all asylum seekers arriving by boat will be processed at the malaria-infested camp on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island or elsewhere in PNG. More significantly, all those granted refugee status will have to settle in PNG. No asylum seeker arriving by boat in Australia will be allowed to settle here. This filthy racist measure would even make a European fascist group, like the British National Party, proud.

The Rudd plan is all the more hideous because many fleeing for asylum are doing so as a result of suffering caused by the Australian imperialist ruling class and its U.S. senior partner. Thus, Iraqis are leaving a country that was first starved by imperialist sanctions, then destroyed by the 2003 U.S./Australia invasion and then torn apart by sectarian bloodletting fostered by the divide and rule policies of the invaders. Tamil refugees, meanwhile, are fleeing the results of Sri Lanka's brutal war on the Tamil rights movement – a war that was backed by Australia and other Western governments which assisted their servants in the Lankan regime by banning the Tamil Tiger separatist movement. Meanwhile, the Lankan regime's murderous scapegoating of the Tamils was aimed at buttressing a system that allowed Western multinationals to superexploit Lankan workers. Among the most prominent of these corporations – and the ones with the worst record of exploiting Lankan workers – are Australian ones like

Ansell. Indeed, immediately after the Lankan military's genocidal victory over the Tamil resistance in mid-2009, the Lankan division of Ansell (which owns a huge sweatshop making surgical gloves) made a high-profile donation of money and gifts to the Sri Lankan military!

It is especially outrageous that the Australian government will not allow refugees arriving by boat to settle here given that this is a resource rich country that is sparsely populated. Of course, those refugees who have managed to settle here have never been a burden on this country in the least. Refugees work (at least when they are *allowed*), pay taxes and buy goods and services – they create as many jobs as they take up and produce as many services as they use. Now they will be dumped in PNG, a country that, **because** it has been bled so dry by Australian neo-colonial exploitation (including having its natural wealth plundered by Australian mining giants like BHP, Newcrest Mining and the part Australian-owned Rio Tinto) suffers from poverty and social dysfunction – including high rates of violence and crime. **Thus refugees, many of whom have suffered so much in their home countries, will now be thrown into an entirely new form of suffering.**

Today, refugees imprisoned on Manus in an Australian-controlled detention camp already live in atrocious conditions when there are less than 150 locked away there. Imagine the horror that refugees will face when Manus reaches its proposed capacity of 3,000 under the Rudd plan. The government says that it will be providing resources to PNG for the scheme. However, this will only allow the Australian ruling class to further increase its neo-colonial stranglehold over PNG – a country whose judiciary and bureaucracy is littered with Australian officials. Yet all that is a Rudd wet dream. Rudd the aggressive imperialist – who proclaimed his vision for capitalist Australia as an “active middle power” “punching above its weight” – swaggers around the region with all the colonial arrogance of the Australian District Officers that lorded it over the local people during the period of direct Australian colonial rule over PNG.



Sydney, 20 July 2013: Protestors in Sydney join others all around the country in the first defiant response to Kevin Rudd's announcement of his cruel and racist "PNG Solution."

The ALP government's racist scheme must meet with mass opposition. It is great that activists have called an emergency protest rally for 12 noon today at Sydney's Town Hall. **We must demand that everyone who makes it to this land is immediately granted residency with the full rights of citizens. Free all the refugees! Close all the detention camps!**


Crucial to efforts to crush the ALP government's latest racist measure is the need to mobilise the industrial power of the organised workers movement behind the struggle. There is potential to do this because ultimately the blows against refugees are blows aimed against the working class. The scapegoating of refugees is aimed at whipping up racism to divide the working class. It is aimed at diverting working class people's frustrations at rising unemployment, poor public services and a lack of affordable housing away from the true cause of these problems – the capitalist exploiters – and onto a vulnerable target. This diversion serves to weaken workers' resistance to the business bosses that exploit them and thus make it easier for the corporate owners to cut jobs and attack working conditions and for the governments that serve these greedy tycoons to neglect social services and slash social welfare.

Yet for the potential for linking up the needed trade union struggle with the refugee rights campaign to be realised the refugee rights movement must re-design its slogans such that they appeal to the class interests of the working class. So we urge all anti-racists to join today's emergency rally but to do so bearing signs calling to unite the needed union struggle against the corporate bigwigs with the defence of refugees and 457 Visa workers. Now, if some upper middle class elements concerned about refugee rights are put off by this ... that's tough! **For the workers class struggle and the anti-racist struggle will either go forwards together or fall back separately. The struggle against racism cannot ultimately triumph unless it becomes part of the struggle against the capitalist system that actually breeds racism.**

There is, however, an obstacle to mobilising the working class in defence of refugees ... and, indeed, in defence of its most direct economic interests. And that obstacle is the ALP's leadership of the workers movement. The Labor Party social democrats act as the agents of the exploiting class within the workers movement. They pretend to stand for workers' interests but, in fact, act to stifle workers struggle while all the while diverting workers' hostility against their exploiters into nationalist resentment against refugees, guest workers and overseas producers. Speaking at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Russian Revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin aptly described how the social democrat opportunists within the workers movement "defend the bourgeoisie better than the bourgeoisie itself." Rudd's announcement yesterday proves that yet again. It was Paul Keating's ALP government that first introduced mandatory detention of refugees in the early 1990s and now it's Rudd's ALP that has taken the cruelty of Australian asylum seeker policy to a new low.

All this underscores why none of the current parliamentary parties should be given any support at all at the upcoming elections. The many nominally socialist groups (most openly today the Solidarity group) who ritually call for a vote for the ALP – either openly or

backhandedly by calling for them to be preferenced ahead of the Liberals – and who are already calling for such support for the ALP at the coming election had better re-consider. For a vote for the ALP is a vote to legitimise the racist Rudd plan, not to a mention a vote to legitimise the war in Afghanistan, a vote for the slashing of payments to low-income single mothers, a vote for cutting higher education funding etc. It is simply a political *crime* for any supposedly socialist group to in any way advocate a vote for Rudd's ALP. If any left-wing group is asking you for your vote then first ask them if they are calling for preferencing the ALP (no left group would, of course, ever consider preferencing the right-wing Liberals). Only those left groups standing in the elections that refuse to give any support to any of the pro-capitalist parliamentary parties should be under consideration as being possibly worthy of your vote.

Sisters and brothers, the social climate is getting uglier and more racist. As unemployment rises and the capitalist crisis spreads into Australia, the political servants of the exploiting class are increasingly scapegoating refugees and 457 Visa workers. Let us politically prepare a serious fight back against the reactionary policies of the current ALP regime and against the inevitable racist and anti-working class attacks of whichever party wins the next election. Let us do this by convincing class conscious youth and anti-racist activists that they don't have to resign themselves to choosing between which party is going to kick them in the guts less hard. **For there is another road! The road of mobilising the industrial muscle of the working class united together with all of the oppressed.** One that builds a true political alternative. A socialist road that completely rejects this decaying and racist capitalist system and all the parties that prop it up! 

RACIST SCAPEGOATING OF REFUGEES AND 457 VISA WORKERS IS AIMED AT ATTACKING WORKERS' RIGHTS

**TRADE UNIONS:
WIN FREEDOM FOR REFUGEES!
DEFEND 457 VISA WORKERS' RIGHTS!**



Official figures show that as of 10 June 2013, there are over 1,850 child refugees being detained in Australia.

July 10: "Nauru Same as Guantanamo!" Referring to the notorious U.S. jail and torture site at Guantanamo Bay, that was the chant of asylum seekers locked up in Nauru during desperate protests earlier this year. Whether imprisoned in Nauru or in the malaria-infested Manus Island camp or on mainland hellholes like Villawood Detention Centre, asylum seekers fleeing to Australia are today being treated every bit as inhumanely by this ALP government as they were by the former Howard government ... and then some!

Cynically, ALP and Coalition politicians – and the racist radio hosts that egg them on – are claiming that their “get tough” on refugees policies are, in part, aimed at saving refugees from drowning at sea. So, people are imprisoned in hellholes that drive many to attempt suicide out of “concern” for their welfare! The same kind of “concern,” no doubt, that was shown when the Australian Navy and Customs callously abandoned the search for the bodies of 55 Tamil refugees who drowned earlier this month. There is no way that would ever happen if the victims had been upper class white people! With such hostility to refugees, no wonder some are dying at sea. Instead of providing help to refugee boats in trouble, Navy and Customs are obsessed with seizing for imprisonment those who do make it through.

When Julia Gillard was ousting Kevin Rudd three years ago, Rudd said he was being targeted, in part, because his rivals wanted to move to the right on the refugee issue. But now, the new Rudd regime is moving even further to the right on refugees. Barely had Rudd’s counter-coup been completed when foreign minister Bob Carr ranted that most asylum seekers are not fleeing persecution and called for the Refugee Review Tribunal to knock back more asylum claims (*Yahoo 7 News*, 28 June.) Labor’s Carr is sounding just like despicable Liberal Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison. The ALP’s ever crueller stance is in turn pushing Abbot’s right-wing Liberals to take an ever more extreme anti-refugee policy. However, when it comes to disgustingly blaming 457 Visa workers for taking local jobs, the ALP outdoes the Liberals. In March, then PM Gillard ranted that she wanted to “Stop foreign workers being put at the front of the queue with Australian workers at the back” (*Herald Sun*, 14 March.)

Yet it is not 457 Visa workers who cause local job losses. No, that is caused by greedy business owners who try to maximise profits by shedding jobs and making those who remain work faster. Thus, the way to save jobs is to mobilise workers’ industrial action – including strikes, occupations and secondary boycotts – to force the greedy bosses to retain their workers *at the expense of their profits*. Make these vultures have to do with a lesser number of luxury yachts



Asylum seekers in Nauru protest against their cruel detention.

and extravagant holiday homes! However, for militant workers to organise the action that is needed, they need their co-workers to be as clear as possible as to who the real enemy is. And they need the greatest unity between workers – including between local and 457 Visa workers. That is why it is crucial to oppose the ALP government’s divisive attempts to blame 457 Visa workers for unemployment. To be sure, the exploiting class does seek to force vulnerable guest workers into accepting substandard conditions in order to drive down the working conditions of all. Yet, that is what they do with all of the more vulnerable workers – including apprentices and casuals. Our response should not be to see these workers as rivals but to demand that they be given exactly the same conditions as other workers. In particular, so that the threat of deportation cannot be used to intimidate guest workers, we must demand they get the full rights of citizens. And to protect these workers against abuses, we must also demand 100% union membership for all 457 Visa workers ... and indeed we must fight for 100% unionisation of all workers (including casuals) full stop!

CONSISTENTLY OPPOSE DIVISIVE “AUSSIES FIRST”-NATIONALISM

Today, media hounds justify the anti-refugee attacks by insisting that politicians are merely following the wishes of working class Western Sydney. Yet the truth is that some of the masses do buy into this largely because they have been fed a barrage of anti-refugee propaganda by racist politicians and media commentators. Indeed, the way that the establishment excuses its anti-refugee attacks with the “reflecting community sentiment” argument resembles the 19th century British imperialists. Then, after feverishly foisting the addictive drug opium upon Chinese people, the British elite, in unleashing war against China for its attempt to restrict the trade, cynically claimed that they were merely adhering to the wishes of ordinary Chinese people because opium was “eagerly sought after by the Chinese people”!

The ruling class’ attacks on refugees are in fact blows **against** the working class people of Western Sydney – and indeed of the whole country. The capitalist ruling elite want to scapegoat refugees so that working class people will be diverted from the truth that it is **they**, the elite, who are the sole cause of the unemployment, the intolerable hospital waiting times and the shortage of affordable housing that so infuriates the masses. The capitalists know that nationalist diversions (like blaming refugees) stop the working class from organising against them and thus enable these exploiters to further assault workers’ rights. That is why for the struggle for workers’ rights to advance, the workers movement must firmly oppose scapegoating of refugees and must take action to demand freedom for refugees, the closure of all detention camps and full rights of citizenship for anyone who makes it here. At the same time, with violent fascist groups emboldened by the war on refugees and the scapegoating of 457 Visa workers, the trade union movement must mobilise alongside “ethnic” youth, Aboriginal people and anti-racist activists to crush the fascist menace.

In an important advance for the refugee rights struggle, the Sydney Branch of the Maritime Workers Union (MUA) has come out strongly in support of asylum seekers. At the June 16 refugee rights rally, leftist Branch secretary Paul McAleer spoke powerfully and passionately about the need to fight for freedom for refugees. This shows the potential for the workers movement to mobilise its industrial muscle behind the struggle for refugee rights.

Unfortunately, at the same time as it takes a worthy stand on the refugee issue, the MUA continues to push a demand that buys into the nationalism that fuels anti-refugee hostility – the demand for “Australian crews on Australian ships.” Such setting up of the interests of Australian workers against their overseas counterparts can only breed resentment to foreigners and thus to refugees as well. What’s more the demand does not actually help to protect “Aussie jobs.” For by dividing local and overseas seamen, maritime workers are denied the *international* unity that they need to be able to stop rich shipping corporations from downsizing their workforces. Now, of course the profit-obsessed shipping bosses seek to use lower wage workers from poorer countries to drive down everyone’s wages. However, the response of our unions should not be to set up Australian workers in rivalry against their overseas counterparts but to **solely** focus on ensuring that all seamen on local routes have the same pay and conditions as local workers.

Similarly to the MUA’s stance on foreign-crewed ships, the pro-ALP officials heading other key unions are aggressively joining the ALP government’s campaign to set up the interests of Australian workers against those of their 457 Visa counterparts. This they are doing even while simultaneously doing some good work to defend the workplace rights of 457 Visa workers themselves. Needless to say, branding foreign workers as competitors of Australian workers is going to create national-chauvinist sentiments hostile to refugees as well.

This economic nationalism promoted by the ALP, since its very founding, runs so deep within society that even some groups



Perth, July 2012: A setback for workers’ unity and the struggle against racism. Demonstration called by union tops demands Australian workers be put ahead of 457 Visa workers. Although rally leaders stressed they were not against immigration, pitting Australian workers against their overseas counterparts can only fuel hostility to migrants and refugees as well. Yet many left groups, like Socialist Alternative, hailed this divisive July 2012 rally.

that have been heavily involved in the struggle for refugee rights have been feeding into it. Thus, the Socialist Alternative (SAlt) group has supported the pro-ALP union bureaucracy’s nationalist campaign to keep out 457 Visa workers (although it has somewhat moderated its stance.) It has sought to justify its stance by downplaying the jingoistic nature of the campaign. To be sure, SAlt is justified in slamming the hypocrisy of the racist business bigwigs that have denounced the unions for being “racist.” And SAlt, itself, has in words distanced itself from the overt calls to “put Australian workers first.” Yet actions speak louder than words. The reactionary nature of SALT’s thrust on 457 Visa workers issue is proven by the fact that it supported and hailed the July 2012

“Local Workers First” rally in Perth (see *Socialist Alternative* article, “Perth Workers Rally For Jobs, Reject Racism Smear”, 3 July 2012.) No matter how many quotes SAIt produces of union officials at the rally insisting that they are not against immigration, the act of loudly demanding that Australian workers be put ahead of overseas workers is not only blatantly divisive but can only fuel hostility to foreigners and thus to refugees as well.

The ideological blanket of xenophobic nationalism that the capitalist ruling class has thrown over the Australian masses is so heavy that any embrace of it in any one arena – for example, on the 457 Visa worker issue – will make it harder to throw off elsewhere, for example on the refugee issue. That is another reason why it is not sufficient to fight for refugee rights only by chanting “Free the Refugees” at refugee rights rallies. There must be a consistent opposition to *Aussies First*-nationalism in every social arena – including crucially within the union movement.

We in Trotskyist Platform are proud that, in all political arenas where we are active, we have been standing squarely against the divisive campaign to keep out 457 Visa workers while calling for the workers movement to win these workers the rights that will prevent them from being specially exploited or used to undercut the conditions of other workers. Thus, at the Sydney May Day rally, we carried a large banner that read:

**Win Full Citizenship Rights and 100% Union Coverage For 457 Visa Workers!
No Competition For Jobs Between Australian and Guest Workers!
Workers United Will Never Be Defeated Means Unity With Guest Workers Too.
Australian, Guest and Overseas Workers Unite To Take Industrial Action
to Force Greedy Capitalist Bosses to Increase Hiring of All Workers**

To its credit, another organisation on the Left, the Solidarity group, which has been heavily involved in the refugee rights struggle, has also taken an internationalist stand on the 457 Visa workers issue. Solidarity has justifiably attacked those left groups that have capitulated to the nationalist campaign. Thus, a Solidarity statement of August 2012 titled, “Open Letter to the Left, Welcome 457 Visa Workers” correctly stated that:

“... The unions’ “Local workers first” campaign is fundamentally directed at keeping out “foreign workers”, especially those employed on 457 visas.

“Tragically, almost all of the left has got behind the union leaderships’ call for the abolition of 457 visas. In the context of a campaign against 457 workers coming here, this can only feed nationalist and racist responses to the economic crisis.

“... Socialist Alliance has explicitly called for scrapping both “Rinehart’s Migration deal and 457 visas” at the same time as promoting “full residency and industrial rights for migrant and guest workers”. But the call for full rights is empty if 457 workers are barred from entry.”

Unfortunately, the Solidarity group then undermines this stance in defence of 457 Visa workers by – rather than refusing to support any of the nationalist, pro-capitalist parties that inhabit parliament – calling for electoral support for the very party that is running both the poisonous campaign against the 457 Visa workers and the Pacific Solution Mark II, the ALP. To be sure, Solidarity makes its backhanded calls to vote Labor while at the same time making strong criticisms of the party. Yet when you call for electoral support for a party, you are doing far more than telling people to tick a certain box on election day as a “lesser evil.” No matter what criticisms you make of the party, you are still effectively telling your audience that its program is, in at least some degree, worthy of support. Thus, any support for the ALP at these elections can only undercut opposition to its racist and anti-working class policies. Furthermore, if Rudd were to pull off an ALP victory, every vote that the ALP received, as opposed to say an informal vote, will be used to legitimise its governing policies: from its racist war on refugees, to its scapegoating of 457 Visa workers, to its cruel slashing of welfare payments for low-income single parents, to its curbs on funding for higher education and to its maintenance of discriminatory laws against unionised construction workers.

RELY ON CLASS STRUGGLE AND NOT ON APPEALS TO THE SMALL-“L”-LIBERAL GREENS

More enthusiastically than they back the ALP, Solidarity and several other groups involved in the refugee rights campaign, like Socialist Alliance, support the Greens (albeit with criticisms.) Yet, although the Greens have spoken out against the worst excesses of the ALP’s war on refugees, the Greens were in a defacto coalition with the government for much of the last three years. In other words, for the Greens the horrors of Labor’s John Howard-like treatment of refugees was not worth leaving coalition government over. That hardly sounds like a party committed to refugee rights! Furthermore, the Greens take an even more extreme opposition to 457 Visa workers than the ALP. When reforms to the 457 Visa scheme passed through parliament last week, it was the Greens who pushed hardest for more stringent “Australian workers first” provisions (see Greens MP Adam Bandt’s own website, 27 June.)

There is another reason why any support for the Greens harms the struggle for refugee rights and harms the fight against racism in general. That is because the Greens do not even claim to be a party that stands for the particular interests of the working class – as even the Labour Party in some way claims to do. Thus, the Greens object to trade unions – the mass organisations of the working class – funding political parties and outrageously equate that with corporate funding for political parties. Indeed, much of the Greens’ base is the upper middle class as well as more liberal members of the capitalist class itself. Therefore, when left groups convince politically active workers to support the Greens they are undermining workers’ understanding that it is only their own class united with the oppressed that can defend their class interests as workers – and not the graces of “nicer”, more liberal capitalists. The loss of this understanding is disastrous for class struggle. For when it happens, instead of mobilising their united industrial power to fight for their rights, workers start hoping and lobbying for a nicer boss that they hope will treat them better which never really happens and gets them nowhere anyway. And if workers are not participating in – or at least seeing their fellow workers



Tim Anderson

Trotskyist Platform banner at Sydney May Day 2013 rally opposes competition for jobs between local and 457 Visa workers and calls for local and 457 Visa workers to unite to take industrial action to force bosses to increase hiring.

unleash – industrial action to defend their rights and jobs against their greedy bosses, they become susceptible to propaganda blaming refugees and migrants for their hardships.

It is indeed precisely because of the low level of workers’ industrial struggle over the last several years that the capitalist rulers have been able to so impregnate some of the masses with hostility to refugees. On the other hand, if there was a serious working class fight back that combined opposition to corporate job slashing with demands for properly funded public hospitals, free childcare and a massive increase in public housing to drive down rents then not only would the working class as a whole become more immune to anti-refugee propaganda but more sections of the unemployed and lower middle classes – amongst the layers most susceptible to racist demagoguery – would realise that the problem is not refugees and migrants but the ruling capitalist exploiting class.

We badly need such a fight back! For with the capitalist world economy continuing to be mired in a deep economic crisis, we are likely to see more job losses here as well. The situation in the likes of Greece and Portugal becomes more unbearable every day, Italy and

France lurch towards a similar fate, in the U.S. real unemployment and homelessness remain at high levels and in the capitalist part of the BRICS countries economic growth is either stalling as in the case of Brazil or completely stagnant as in the case of Russia. If the Australian economy has remained relatively stable, it is solely because China's powerhouse socialistic economy has been buying up Australian exports at ever higher levels. However, as new mineral resources are discovered in other parts of the world and China consciously refocuses its economy on services and high-end manufacturing, China will no longer be buying Australian mineral resources at the same rate. The effects of this will flow on to the whole Australian economy. Then, Australian business owners who have ripped fortunes out of their workers' toil will not think twice before slashing the jobs of these same workers that made them rich. If the workers movement does not then take action to prevent such job cuts then racist demagogues will surely feed off the resulting increase in unemployment and insecurity. Unfortunately, this is what is happening in Europe where far right racist groups are gaining strength.

To unleash the kind of class struggle that we so desperately need, our unions must be re-directed onto a new agenda. The current pro-ALP union leaders shy away from industrial action. They accept the fraud that workers' wellbeing depends on their bosses' business being as profitable as possible. Thus, our current leaders' main response to job slashing has been to try and make the culpable firms more profitable through calling for protectionist measures to give them the edge over overseas producers. Against this losing strategy, we need our unions led by a program that does not accept the leaching bosses' "right" to maximise profits. A program that says, instead, that workers have a right to a job and that this must be defended by any means necessary – and that means by militant industrial action to force the bosses to accept more jobs at the expense of their profits. A union leadership fighting on such a program would need to do everything possible to unite the working class – most importantly by taking action to oppose the diversionary scapegoating of 457 Visa workers and refugees.




Zebedee Parkes

March 2012: Police attack and arrest protesters at the Nyoongar Aboriginal Tent Embassy in WA. As refugees, guest workers and non-white migrant communities are attacked by the racist establishment spewing hysterical claims that these immigrants are "flooding the country," this same ruling class establishment conducts vicious racist oppression of this country's first peoples. Unlike refugees and other migrants who come to this country merely to seek a better life, the British colonialists that established capitalist Australia came with the purpose of conquering the Aboriginal people and plundering their land. The Australian capitalist rulers' continued racist assaults on Aboriginal people are, just like their attacks on refugees, aimed at scapegoating vulnerable communities for the poor social services and other hardships caused by their system and additionally at justifying their ongoing conquest of Aboriginal people's land.

Yet, the struggle for refugee rights does not simply depend on what politics guides the union movement. It also depends on what politics guide the refugee rights movement itself. In order for larger sections of the workers movement to be won to the refugee rights campaign, the campaign itself needs to outline a program that motivates how fighting for refugee rights is essential for the workers movement to unify and strengthen its ranks so that it can better resist its exploiters. This, the refugee rights movement must do through, for example, **the slogans it uses for calling rallies.**

However, this is not only a vital step for the movement to take – it is also a huge step. For taking this step will necessarily repel from the movement liberal ruling class elements and some of the upper-middle class elements who are anti-union and anti-industrial action. Yet so be it! Without appealing to the class interests of the working class, the refugee rights campaign will not be able to win decisive chunks of the workers movement to its side.

Sisters and brothers, many anti-racist activists have worked so hard to publicise the plight of refugees, to bring their humanity to the public, to broadcast their sufferings and pleas to wider audiences. This is crucial work. However, without the social power of the workers movement behind us, the chances of victory are greatly minimised. That is why the movement must urgently recast its slogans so that they appeal to workers' class interests. We must say: "Don't let the bosses' politicians divide workers with racism! Make our unions stronger – Build workers' unity – Fight for refugee rights!" and "Don't let the ruling class get off the hook by blaming refugees. Let us working class people support refugees so that we can better focus people on who the real enemies are – the greedy corporate bosses who lay off workers at will and grab so much wealth that there is little left for social infrastructure."

There is an additional overarching reason why the refugee movement must explicitly link its struggle with that of the workers' struggle against the capitalist exploiters. That is because in the long run we cannot get rid of the racism – that today in Australia targets refugees, non-white "ethnic" communities, overseas students and 457 Visa workers alike – unless we can sweep away this capitalist system that breeds it and replace it with an egalitarian socialist society where the material basis for racism will simply not exist. We thus need the refugee rights movement and, indeed, every other progressive social movement to contribute to the struggle against capitalism by directing its participants onto an anti-capitalist path. Let's fight hard to do this while at the same time maximising our chances of victory in the refugee rights struggle today – **let's unite the refugee rights struggle with the class struggle of the working class!** 

DON'T LET OUR FELLOW WORKERS WHO LOSE THEIR JOBS BECOME DESTITUTE!

**UNLEASH MILITANT CLASS STRUGGLE TO RESTORE THE SINGLE PARENT PAYMENT AND MASSIVELY INCREASE BOTH THE PARENTING PAYMENT AND NEWSTART ALLOWANCE!
SMASH THE ALP GOVERNMENT'S ATTACK
ON LOW-INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS!**

ALP'S SLASHING OF PAYMENTS TO POOR SINGLE PARENTS PROVES ONCE AGAIN THAT NONE OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED AT THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS



The three big stooges of the big business elite. Although they have outlined slightly different plans about how to administer Australia (in the interests of the capitalist exploiting class), all have shown contempt for the plight of low income single mothers.

March 8, 2013: At the turn of the year, Australian billionaire James Packer and his family were enjoying first use of their latest family toy: a 52-metre super yacht costing over \$50 million! However, for tens of thousands of low-income, single parents the reality could not be more different. They are now going to struggle, even more than before, to buy their children medicine let alone merely a \$2 toy. The ALP federal government has thrown over 84,000 low-income single parents off the Parenting Payment and on to the

much lower Newstart Allowance. If this isn't bad enough, those single parents who have part-time jobs face even more savage cuts to their income as the Newstart Allowance is more ruthless than the Parenting Payment in cutting payments to those who do manage to find any part-time work.

Single parents with children over eight years old who were new applicants for income support were actually first thrown onto the lower unemployment payment back in 2006 by the Howard Liberal government. However, those already receiving payments were allowed to continue to receive the higher Parenting Payment until their child turned 16. When the ALP came into office, it not only maintained the policy of dumping new applicants onto Newstart but in the 2011 budget additionally threw those still receiving the Parenting Payment with children over 12 onto Newstart as well. Now, continuing to maintain the disgusting direction first taken by Howard, it has dumped onto Newstart those with children between 8 and 12 who, previously under their old rules, had still been receiving the Parenting Payment.

Around 90% of families affected by the changes brought into force from January 1 are headed by single mothers. Even before the latest burden was heaped on them, many such families were living under conditions of crushing poverty. They often had to skip meals and default on utility payments and many didn't even dream of going for dental check-ups. Many a low-income single mother had been faced with the choice of either foregoing buying their kids basic clothing or not paying the fee needed to allow their children to participate in a school excursion. Now, on top of all this, the latest cuts will slash their income by between \$60 and \$110 a week. How on earth will they get by?

The cruel blow to low-income single parents comes at a time when big business bosses have been allowed by governments to extract billions more in profits. The likes of Gina Rinehart, Clive Palmer, Andrew Forrest, Anthony Pratt and the Lowy family are gaining this obscene wealth not out of their own labour but by stealing the fruit of the labour of their employees and, in the case

of the mining magnates, by also hoarding for themselves the natural resources of this land. Yet, through either directly owning the media or having tycoon mates own the media outlets, these capitalist parasites are portrayed as deserving, "outstanding citizens." In contrast, single mothers who nobly battle through poverty, male chauvinism at every corner and the bureaucratic bullying faced by all the poor are portrayed by talkback shock jocks and "investigative" reporters as undeserving, "welfare mums." This disgusting media coverage of single mothers is similar to the vicious portrayal of other oppressed groups like Aboriginal people, refugees, the unemployed and African, Asian and Middle Eastern communities. It has helped to grease the skids for the Gillard government's savage cuts to payments for single parents which has, in turn, further reinforced hostile myths about low-income single mothers.

The slashing of payments for low-income single parents is one of many policies enacted by various Australian governments that attack the working class and the poor. The Rudd/Gillard ALP government has continued John Howard's racist policy of quarantining 50% of the income of Aboriginal people receiving social security payments in the Northern Territory. Furthermore, it has extended this policy to people of all ethnicities in five other areas including the multiracial Western Sydney suburb of Bankstown and the South Brisbane suburb of Logan. Liberal state governments, for their part, have been throwing workers onto welfare by slashing public service jobs. Meanwhile, federal and state governments have united to sell off public housing - such as in the Claymore area in Southwest Sydney - which is making worse the already dire shortage of affordable rental accommodation.

All these attacks on working class people are taking place whether it is the Liberal-National Coalition in government or the ALP. The only difference is that the Conservatives do it with a hostile voice while the ALP leaders sometimes claim that they are actually trying to help their working class base ... at the very same moment that they're shafting them! How far the ALP leaders truly are from their working class supporters was highlighted by the infamous

attempt by ALP Families Minister, Jenny Macklin, to justify the attack on single parents. She arrogantly claimed that she could live on Newstart payments - even though these are 25 times less than the salary she receives as a minister!

HOW TO DEFEAT THIS ATTACK ON SINGLE MOTHERS?

Australian Government
Department of Human Services
centrelink

Ms [redacted] NSW 27 [redacted]

14 January 2013

Your Newstart Allowance

Immediate payment 01/01/2013 to 14/01/2013 due on 15/01/2013 **\$77.95**

Regular payment from payment date 29/01/2013

Newstart Allowance	\$533.00
Plus Pharmaceutical Allowance	\$6.20
Less Court Fines	-\$20.00
Less Electricity	-\$150.00
Less General Community Housing	-\$221.50
Less Basic Household Goods	-\$69.75
Total	\$77.95

▶ IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Trotskyist Platform

Mission Impossible: A jobless single mother trying to get by following the government's slashing of the single parenting payment. Her Centrelink payment form, shown above and typical of the situation faced by many other single mothers, shows that, after payments for rent (which are shown here after Rent Assistance is deducted from rent costs), electricity and loan repayments for basic household electrical goods (this woman elected to have these repayments and her electricity costs automatically deducted), there is hardly anything left over! Even if the small court fine repayment did not exist, the amount she has left is not anywhere near enough to cover her own food, phone bills, medicine and transport for a fortnight – let alone clothing or any hope of entertainment! That means she is forced to use some of the meagre Family Tax Benefit payments, meant to help her pay for some of her three dependent children's expenses, in order to survive. Her whole family is thus dragged into poverty. Tens of thousands of other families in Australia headed by single mothers face the same plight.

When, at the start of this year, the reality hit home of just how much their family pay had been gouged, many of the affected parents were reduced to tears. However, now single mothers are each realising that they are not the only individuals suffering. They are sharing their stories with each other and are getting organised. On February 5, single mothers and their supporters rallied across the country against the government's attack on them. This shows the potential for a fight back. The key issue now is what strategy should the campaign be based upon.

The February 5 rally, in Sydney at least, was dominated by the politics of ACOSS (the Australian Council of Social Services) and the Greens. They share a similar strategy. ACOSS, in particular, emphasises the need to lobby politicians and those in the top echelons of society like the business elite. Yet it is precisely in the interest of the corporate bosses that the slashing of payments to low-income single parents is being made. In order to continue to run, the inefficient capitalist machine constantly needs to suck more and more out of working class people. And capitalist bosses always seek to create a layer of poverty-stricken people who are so desperate for work that they will accept working under the worst conditions. This can then be used to undermine workplace rights for all workers. As for the mainstream politicians, they kowtow to these big business owners who are the people really running this country.

What the Greens were offering on February 5 was a parliamentarist strategy – which basically amounts to ... vote for them! They are indeed the one party currently represented in parliament that is, at least, formally opposing the dumping of single parents onto Newstart. However, the Greens have little ability to actually fight against such attacks on the poor because they accept the fundamental cause of these attacks – the ownership of the decisive sections of the economy by a small class of profit-driven exploiters. Indeed, although the Greens, as environmentalists, have a particular dislike for the mining bosses, they do not even pretend to stand for the particular interests of the working class against the capitalist bosses in general. It turns out that a good

part of the Greens' active base is the "progressive" section of the upper-middle class. As small-l liberals, people in this social layer are quite happy to complain about the aggressive right-wing stance of many of the big capitalist bosses yet are completely loyal to the social structure that those capitalists have created – a social structure that is seeing these upper-middle class "progressives" sitting very comfortably ... *thank you very much*. Furthermore, the Greens also directly represent a layer of the actual capitalist upper class – in particular some of the service sector bosses and the non-mining, new industry big wigs. Indeed, prior to the 2010 federal elections, one such capitalist, Graeme Wood who has extracted a nearly \$400 million fortune from exploiting the hundreds of employees working at his Wotif online travel company gave the Greens a whopping \$1.6 million donation – the largest single donation in Australian political history.

Thus, beholden to a section of the capitalists, singing the tune of upper-middle class elements comfortable with the current social order and with no program to mobilise the working class against the rich exploiting class, the Greens in office would, just like the ALP, subordinate themselves to the needs of the corporate elite. The way that ALP politicians have dealt with the issue of the Parenting Payment provides a vivid illustration of how a "progressive" party that is unwilling to challenge the power of the capitalists behaves when in government. Would you believe that when the previous federal Liberal government stopped new applicants from getting the Parenting Payment in 2006, the ALP actually opposed the measure? Yet, once in government and thus compelled to administer the system "responsibly" in the interests of the big business bosses, the ALP not only maintained this measure but, as we now know, has made it even harsher. Given that the Greens are also committed to "responsibly" administering the capitalist order, can we be sure that even if the Greens were to become the dominant part of a new Greens-ALP coalition government – or even won elections outright - they would repeal these cruel policies? Don't bet too much on it! After all, the Greens agreed to enter a defacto coalition with the ALP in 2010 on the basis of an agreement that said not a single word about getting

Howard's policy on the Parenting Payment repealed – nor, for that matter, anything else of substance in the interests of working class people. And goodness knows they had the power, as the fate of a hung election actually hang dangling in the balance, to extract whatever concessions they wanted from the ALP at this moment. The Greens stuck to their coalition with the ALP throughout the period when the ALP government threw a new group of single parents off the Parenting Payment in the 2011 budget and then after the latest cruel measure was first announced in the May 2012 Budget. It is only last month, some whole nine months after the Gillard government first announced that it would throw onto Newstart the single parents with children over eight still receiving the Parenting Payment that the Greens have, at least in a formal sense, ended their alliance with Labor. Furthermore, even though the attack on single mothers was mentioned by the Greens as one of the reasons for the divorce it was only noted as a secondary reason. Indeed, the real reason for the "split" was that the Greens realised that it was better for their electoral prospects to distance themselves from the ALP. Meanwhile, the Greens have promised to vote with the government on supply bills until the September election, effectively keeping the defacto alliance with Labor in place. This hardly sounds like a party truly determined to crush the attacks on low-income, single mothers!

So if a strategy of lobbying mainstream politicians and campaigning for the Greens is not the way to go, what strategy is needed? What is necessary is to mobilise a social force powerful enough to push back the rich ruling class whom the mainstream politicians serve. That force is the organised workers' movement. A glimpse of the potential power of this movement to fight against injustice was seen in the campaign of strikes and demonstrations by the ASU and other trade unions during 2010-11 to fight for higher pay for community sector workers. This campaign was rightly fought as a struggle also for Equal Pay for Equal Work since the largely female community sector workers were paid considerably less than male workers doing similar work in other industries. Although the pro-ALP union officials did not unleash the kind of militant industrial action that could have delivered a real knockout victory for the



Wodonga, Victoria, October 2012: Unionised disability service workers protest against poor wages and conditions. Women workers, united together in workers' organisations with their male counterparts, are destined to play a key role in the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

campaign, the stopworks and mass rallies that did take place were enough to win a partial victory that will see the pay of community sector workers gradually increased over a number of years.

If the industrial muscle of the union movement was mobilised today alongside the determination of low-income single mothers to fight for justice, it could be the beginning of a fight back by the working class and poor against years of attacks on their rights. There is a real possibility of building such a movement because it is in the very interest of the entire working class to oppose the slashing of payments to low-income people. It only takes one decision to slash jobs by their greedy bosses and many a worker could end up in the same desperate situation that low-income single parents and those more generally on Newstart are facing. Furthermore, when workers realise how vulnerable their lives will become if they get sacked, it makes them less likely to stand up to their

bosses and this undermines union organising and workers rights struggles. That is why a movement must be urgently built that will fight to not only repeal the latest attack on single mothers but will also demand a massive increase in the payments received by all low-income single parents and, indeed, all of the unemployed. This should be combined with other demands in the interests of the poor such as for a massive increase in public housing, for the abolition of all fees for public school students (including for excursions and for computer use), for free dental care, for a big increase in resources for public hospitals and so much more. Of course, faced with such demands the mainstream politicians will yell: we cannot let the budget deficit rise, it will cause chaos! To this we will say: yes, that is why your masters, the capitalist bigwigs, must be made to pay for all these social programs out of the spectacular profits they have been extracting out of workers' labour!

FIGHT FOR WORK FOR ALL ON FULL PAY!

Any struggle to fight for the rights of the poor must ultimately be connected to a struggle for jobs for all. For what unemployed people really want are not welfare payments or insulting work-for-the-dole "jobs" but real jobs with decent pay and full union protections. This has not stopped this ALP government, like previous Liberal Party governments, from insinuating that unemployed people have a problem with the work ethic. They claim that the welfare cuts they have imposed are aimed at spurring people back into work. If these arrogant ruling class politicians even believe what they are saying they must be in a state of self delusion! For almost everyone who has ever done it hard knows that the reason people are unemployed is because the jobs are just not there. And the sole reason that the jobs are not available is because the greedy corporate bosses are constantly trying to slash their labour costs to maximise profits. Just look at the companies that have announced major job cuts in the last few months. Take Origin Energy. Last financial year its owners made a whopping \$980 million profit. However, that was not enough for them so this year Origin is in the process of slashing 850 jobs.

Meanwhile, in the last three months, building services giant Boral made a series of announcements of job cuts that amounted to over a 1,000, this despite making a profit last financial year of \$177 million.

Given the profit obsession of the capitalist business owners, it is often single mothers who find it the hardest to get into the workforce. Firstly, bosses are often unwilling to allow single mothers the work times and flexibility that will allow them to both work and look after their children which is essential given the difficulty in obtaining affordable childcare. Furthermore, capitalists, thinking only of the bottom line, are usually averse to spending the resources to train or retrain a single mother who may have spent years out of the industrial workforce while busy with the essential job of bringing up children.

The starting point for any struggle for jobs must be solid strike action backed by picket lines to defeat job cuts at places like Origin Energy and Boral. Furthermore, there must be built a broader movement - uniting all workers and unemployed people - that demands that the capitalist bosses take on and train more workers at the expense of their profits. Such a mass campaign backed by militant industrial action would fight to force the governments serving the bosses into a concession by demanding the institution of specific laws prescribing minimum required increases in labour force that profitable - or formerly profitable - enterprises must make. Now, in response to such demands, the corporate elite will surely scream: if our profits are cut we will stop investing and the economy will collapse! They will be no doubt fully backed up in this by their servants in the pro-capitalist mainstream political parties. The top bureaucrats of various government departments will also echo these "concerns." Meanwhile, the courts would pronounce our demands "unconstitutional" and police would try to attack our strike pickets and mass rallies. However, to all of them we will respond: if your system cannot provide jobs and a decent life for all of us then it is your system that has to go! We will sweep away your fake "democratic" parliament, your bureaucratic organs and your "justice"/legal system that all

serve only you - the rich exploiting class - and replace them with a new state constructed to serve working class people. This will enable us to rip the industry, mines, banks, transport systems and communications infrastructure out of the hands of the capitalists and put it all into the collective hands of all working class people. Then natural resources and the labour of workers will be used not to produce fabulous profits for a few but to finally provide for a decent life for each and everyone. In such a socialist system, unemployment would be non-existent. This is not only because an economy in the hands of the masses would want to ensure that everyone has the right to work but because in an economy seeking to maximise benefits for the people, it makes absolutely no sense to waste people's potential for mental and physical labour by failing to find them meaningful work.

If we don't succeed in winning such a socialist system then the ever worsening attacks on the poor that we are seeing in Australia today will not be our greatest fear. For we will be threatened by the danger that the irrational capitalist system could undergo a catastrophic collapse that would throw a large proportion of the working class into the extreme poverty that many low-income single parents are already facing today. This is what is happening right now in several capitalist countries in Europe and elsewhere. In Greece, Spain, Portugal and other parts of Europe spiralling unemployment combined with brutal austerity measures that have slashed social programs have led to a huge increase in homelessness. In both Greece and Spain, the official unemployment rate is now over 26% (the real unemployment rate being even higher.) Right now in Greece, nearly three out of every five people under the age of 25 who want to work are out of a job! If Australia is not yet in the same situation, it is mainly because purchases by China's booming socialistic state-owned enterprises have kept the economy here afloat. However, even socialistic China will not be able to hold up the capitalist Australian economy forever. Ultimately, only by sweeping away this capitalist system can we avoid in the long term being hit with a Greece-style collapse.



Trotskyist Platform

"Marriage is Sex Slavery. Poverty is Not Newstart" - Sydney, March 2013:
A contingent of single mothers at the International Women's Day march protested against the ALP government's cruel cut to the single parenting payment. However, desperate not to upset the electoral prospects of the ALP and the Greens (who had been in a defacto coalition with the ALP at the time of the cutback), march organisers gave the single mothers' struggle short shrift in the official part of the rally.

UNSHACKLE THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT FROM TIES TO THE ALP

For there to be a real fight back to defend the rights of the poor and the entire working class then there needs to be a radical change in the political orientation that leads the union movement. Currently, our unions are led by pro-ALP officials who subordinate the unions to the goal of assisting the ALP to get elected to office. The hope is that once in government, the ALP will deliver some benefits for working class people. However, this has proven to be an utterly bankrupt strategy. It is true that unlike the openly anti-union Liberals, many ALP politicians would prefer it if they could deliver some modest gains for their working class base. However, the logic of accepting the capitalist order means that even this they cannot deliver. Just recall the whole sad saga of the mining tax. Originally, Kevin Rudd when prime minister planned to introduce a so-called Resource Super-Profits Tax. It was very weak but a small part of the revenues from the tax was slated to be used to benefit working class

people in some very modest way. This was, however, way too much for the mining bosses and their mates in the Murdoch media. They leveraged their massive wealth to launch an expensive advertising and media campaign against the tax. ALP heavies were so spooked by this campaign and so worried that the mining bosses would sabotage economic expansion as a form of corporate protest that they dumped Rudd as prime minister even as he was preparing to buckle to the mining bosses himself! The newly-installed prime minister, Gillard, then made sure that her very first act was to completely water down the original tax. It has now turned out that the new "tax" is so diluted that in its first six months' of operation it has allowed the owners of fabulously wealthy BHP, Rio Tinto and Xstrata to get away without, barely, paying a cent!

Today, with a federal election just six months away, the pro-ALP union officials are doing their best to downplay opposition to the cruel cutback of payments to low-income single parents. In the meantime they are working overtime to hold back any strike struggles that could disrupt Labor's election hopes. This anti-struggle approach is disastrous to low-income single mothers, to workers facing job losses at Boral, Qantas, Origin Energy etc and, indeed, to the whole working class. That is why we in Trotskyist Platform fight to bring an understanding to working class people that none of the current parliamentary parties should be supported at the upcoming election - either openly or in a backhanded way. Of course, no working class person with any political consciousness is going to support the aggressively anti-poor and racist politician, Tony Abbott. But neither should we be supporting the ALP. From the Rudd/Gillard government's maintenance of the decisive aspects of Howard's Workchoices, to the recent slashing of payments to single parents, the ALP government has proven to be an anti-working class government. As for the Greens, they may oppose some of the most extreme reactionary policies of the Liberals and the ALP, yet as defacto coalition partners with the ALP over much of the last two and a half years they bear responsibility for most of the attacks on the poor that have gone down. Furthermore, for every politically aware

working class person who ends up voting for the Greens - a party that includes capitalists and does not even pretend to stand for the explicit class interests of workers - the working class degrades its understanding of the basic truth that only those who openly stand for the class interests of workers against the capitalists can even be under consideration as being worthy of any support.

In response to our policy, social democrats argue that as much as the ALP has done to harm the working class and the poor, it should be supported as a lesser evil to the right-wing Liberals. Such an argument can only breed defeatism. Imagine a school where the mass of students are facing a group of bullies who used to be their friends. However, now a new gang of bullies who came from another school is threatening to take over as top dogs. The existing bullies then say to the mass of students: support us against the new bullies because we will at least punch you in the guts softer than the new lot. Should students simply accept this – just like workers should accept voting for Labor? Or shouldn't they say: no, we will neither support you nor the new lot! You can slug it out but we are going to organise to resist whichever bully emerges as top dog and are not going to divert from this task by getting tied up with one lot of bullies. Let's not be despondent! Let's get organised to resist whichever government gets elected to administer capitalism!

Reformist leftists then throw at us: if you carry out such a policy and it is a close election, the non-vote for the ALP by people influenced by your agitation could end up being the decisive factor in swinging the result to Abbott. To this we say: for every pro-working class person, who naturally hates Abbott, whom we convince not to vote for the ALP either because we've demonstrated that no party that submits to the capitalist order can really offer a way forward, the overall political understanding of the working class will rise. Hence, the working class will better be able to resist the inevitable attacks of whichever party does get elected in September.

It is worth noting that already there are many working class people who refuse to vote for any of the current parliamentary

parties. For example, in the last federal election in the heavily "ethnic", south-western Sydney working class seat of Blaxland (which includes suburbs like Auburn, Fairfield and Bankstown) over 14% of people who showed up to vote ended up "voting" informally ie effectively rejecting every candidate on the ballot (see the Australian Electoral Commission website for the 2010 election results.) This was more than twice the vote for the Greens in that seat! Another 10% of people risked fines by not voting at all. Notably, in the seat of Blaxland, the informal vote alone was 58% higher than in the previous election. Now, to be sure, the informal vote could represent people coming from a whole lot of directions including some who are just politically demoralised. However, it is undoubted that a proportion of informal "voters" would be politically aware workers who are suitably opposed to the Liberals but who realise too that the ALP are sell-outs of the working class. That this is the case is supported by the fact that the informal "vote" is much lower in wealthier areas. For example, in the Upper North Shore seat of Bradfield, which includes rich suburbs like Turramurra, Pymble and Wahroonga, the informal "vote" was only just over 4%.

Clearly, an authentic socialist party would seek to make a connection with those who for pro-working class reasons joined the nearly quarter of the electorate in the seat of Blaxland who either showed up to "vote" informally or did not show up at all. We will say to these people: We applaud the fact that you did not vote for any of the capitalist parliamentary parties and we are urging the same stance too. We say we should not be despondent either. We cannot rely on any of the parties running government to make working class people's lives better but we can win gains by unleashing the industrial power of the working class in militant action. To make our struggle more powerful we need to unite the demands of the workers movement for better working conditions and against job cuts with the demands of all the poor and downtrodden like single mothers who largely depend upon government welfare for their family's sheer survival.

Unity of working class people and the poor against the exploiting class is what we need. This unity must extend also to guest workers and to workers overseas. Unity of workers of the world is especially essential to defeat anti-working class attacks by the likes of corporate giants like BHP, Rio Tinto and Qantas that have operations in many countries around the world. To defend against exploitation of 457 Visa guest workers and to defeat efforts to use the scheme to undermine working conditions, the workers movement must reach out in solidarity to these foreign workers. It must fight for 100% union coverage, for the guest workers to have the same working conditions as local workers and for them to have the full rights of citizens so that the threat of deportation cannot be used to intimidate these workers from standing up to the bosses.

Yet this is not at all the emphasis of the current leaders of the ACTU. They are, instead, focussed on demanding that “Aussie workers get jobs first.” This is not only divisive but violates the most basic tenet of unionism: Workers should not compete with their fellow workers for favoured treatment by the bosses. The current union tops’ strategy does nothing positive for the fight for jobs. All it does is leave workers of different countries squabbling with each other over who should get first preference while the capitalist bosses in their various countries are laughing all the way to the bank. Moreover, it harmfully makes out that the cause of unemployment is that some workers are getting the jobs instead of others when in fact the real problem is that the profit-driven bosses are slashing jobs instead of hiring and training workers. **The only way we are going to force capitalist “employers” to stop cutting jobs and start hiring is through the method of class struggle. Yet the starting point for such action is workers unity – not competition for favoured treatment.**

There is another thing that is very destructive about the ACTU’s campaign for “Aussie workers first.” And that is that the campaign naturally fuels nationalism and inevitably also racism. Such nationalism and racism ranks alongside illusions in ALP parliamentarism as the greatest political obstacle to the masses



Beijing, March 2010: Deputies from southwest China's Yunnan Province arrive for a sitting of China's parliament, the National Peoples Congress. Although undermined by bureaucratic deformation and a degree of capitalist intrusion, socialistic rule in China has brought a big leap forward for women's rights. This is especially clear when comparing the status of women in China with that of capitalist developing countries like India and Pakistan. When socialism triumphs in Australia, women will be liberated from the oppression that they face today.

fighting for their rights. For nationalism and racism divert all the masses anger at unemployment, welfare cuts, lack of affordable housing, deteriorating public services etc onto targets that have no responsibility for these problems at all - like refugees and guest workers. Meanwhile, they turn the fire away from the real culprits – the capitalist exploiters. That is why it is essential that the working class movement undercuts all efforts by the capitalists to divide and divert their ranks with racism. To do so it must positively mobilise to fight for the rights of 457 Visa guest workers, to demand freedom and full citizenship rights for refugees and to crush violent, far right racist groups.

UNLEASH THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION



Women from the masses will play a leading role in the revolutionary struggle against Australian capitalism as they did in the victorious Chinese Revolution that toppled capitalist rule there in 1949. The above scene from the world famous Chinese ballet, The Red Detachment of Women, celebrates the contribution of Chinese women to the revolution. Based on the true stories of Chinese women who joined a company of the communist liberation army in Hainan Island, the ballet tells of the life of a peasant woman who wrests herself from brutal oppression at the hands of the landlords and goes on to become a leader of the anti-capitalist forces. The above ballet scene is taken from a performance by the renowned National Ballet of China in Tianjin city on 26 September 2009 as part of celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution/founding of the Peoples Republic of China.

As smug ALP and Liberal/National politicians consider how much the cutting of single parent payments will affect the Budget bottom line, single parents themselves are already suffering the effects of the measure. Many single mothers are being driven into demoralisation and depression by the cuts. Many will face social isolation through not being able to afford to take part in social activities or even to afford the transport to get to events. The children in these families face falling behind at school and

isolation from their peers as their parents will struggle to afford to pay school computer-use fees and fees for school excursions, let alone fees for participating in sports teams or for attending music lessons or any extra-curricular activities at all. Some of those parents in the most desperate situation may turn to petty crime to provide for their children. This could become the start of a rapid downward spiral. The rich people's justice system that they may get caught up in is cruelly unsympathetic to the poor.

Perhaps the most dangerous effect of the ALP's cut to single parent payments is that it could force some single mothers to enter into, or maintain, relationships with more economically secure men who happen to treat them badly - or who are even violent towards them - just to help eke out an existence. This fact makes a mockery of Julia Gillard's pretensions to be concerned with the rights of women. Last October, when Gillard attacked Tony Abbott's misogyny, her speech understandably received enthusiastic praise from mostly middle class women. She probably believed much of what she said. However, regardless of her subjective views the reality that she is administering capitalism means that not only does she help perpetuate the oppression of women but, as we see with her slashing of the single parent payment, Gillard is actually intensifying it.

Marxists understand that key to ending misogyny is winning women's economic independence. This is obviously crucial on an individual level - for example, by allowing women to select their partners without being influenced by any economic compulsion. However, the society-wide effect is just as important. Only when women are fully economically independent and able to fully participate in economic and political life will attitudes to women and the way women are treated by men also change. Backward, male chauvinist behaviour and attitudes that are all too prevalent in Australian society will gradually retreat and wither away. That is why it is crucial to fight for jobs for all and for equal pay between men and women workers. We must also call for free abortion on demand and freely available access to all forms of contraception. To allow women the greatest chance to participate in economic life, we must fight for free 24-hour childcare, for

free school lunches at all public schools and for after-school sports, music and cultural activities provided for free by the state alongside free transport from school to these activities. All these demands, however, clash head-on with the current system because the capitalists who control the economy are not going to want to sacrifice their profits to make these social programs and full employment possible. **Thus, while we can make headway in women's emancipation through winning concessions through struggle under capitalism, we will only fully open the door to women's complete liberation when the capitalist system is replaced by a socialist one. A socialist society will recognise all the responsibilities and hard work that being a mother and/or a housekeeper entail and will ensure that women have complete economic independence. It will ensure that all the tasks of housework and child rearing that today are almost exclusively in the domain of women within family confines can be taken up as the collective responsibility of society. Subsequently, this will allow each and every woman the opportunity to fully participate in all areas of economic, social and political life.**

However, women will not only be a *major beneficiary* of socialism. Working class women, who have the most to gain by ripping up this current system, will also be *key drivers* of the struggle to overthrow capitalism. The most powerful example of this occurred on International Women's Day in 1917 in Russia. Then in the Russian capital, tens of thousands of mainly women textile workers walked off the job to demand bread. Their struggle sparked off a general strike and a revolt against the tsarist monarchy. The resulting revolutionary period that was opened up culminated six months later in the October Socialist Revolution. Ninety-six years later this struggle remains the shining path for the fight for women's emancipation and for the liberation of the masses more generally.

A more modest example of the powerful role that working class women are destined to play was seen last December in the strike for better pay by Sargents Pie factory workers in the Western Sydney suburb of Colyton. Women workers at the factory joined their male counterparts in playing a prominent role in the strike picket line.



Sydney, December 2012: Picket outside Sargents Pie factory.

Although the strike was before long called off by union officials, it gave a small taste of the potential militancy of low-paid workers. Often concentrated in manufacturing and warehousing sectors, low paid workers have the least to lose in opposing the current social order. These workers, especially when working in work sites that bring together female and male workers and workers of many ethnicities, can be the strongest living bridge connecting the organised workers movement with other oppressed sectors such as low-income single mothers, the unemployed and members of "ethnic" communities.

The cruel attacks of capitalism, exemplified by the ALP government's slashing of single parent payments, will inevitably bring the masses into struggle. The question is: on what program will the masses respond? We must build a political organisation that will fight to ensure that the masses respond on a program that can win - a program of militant class struggle. Such a program would be based on unity of the working class with all the oppressed, the unity of workers of all nations and the busting of illusions in "progressive", pro-capitalist parliamentary parties. **Smash the ALP government's attack on single parent payments! Restore the single parent payment! Massively increase the Newstart Allowance and Parenting Payment! Permanent jobs for all at full pay! For free 24 hour childcare! In fighting for these gains today, let us gain confidence for the future revolutionary struggle for a workers state tomorrow!**

In the latter part of last year, Trotskyist Platform comrade Samuel Kim, who is of Korean ancestry, travelled to South Korea. Here is his account of his experiences.

AN EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT OF CAPITALIST SOUTH KOREA

I met relatives for the first time at Incheon Airport, South Korea. As we travelled towards Seoul, I looked out the car window. Out there were signs of highly urbanised life: tall, twenty storey buildings clumped together in the distance and we hadn't even reached Seoul, the capital city, just yet. I remember being eager to see every aspect of South Korea, especially the 'development' of an 'Asian Tiger Economy' under capitalism. In the following article I will share my experiences of and some of my discoveries about South Korea: conversations with the people, a rally for workers' rights that I attended and my thoughts on the situation in general of socialists and left-wing activists in South Korea.

THE JOURNEY TO KOREA

In the first place, I have to mention that it has been a painful and long journey for our family to finally return to South Korean soil again after many years of living in Australia. As a child I remember the threat of repression from the immigration authorities and the fear of deportation from Australia despite having actually been born and raised in Australia, myself. Here in Australia I witnessed the denial of equal rights that in its turn gave way to exploitation at the hands of greedy bosses. My parents often worked as subcontractors for supermarket cleaning companies, pushed trollies and worked in the textile industry. The pay was meagre, \$500 a week for full time work. Today, our working class situation is one of many where migrants and all working class people endure exploitation at the hands of the Australian capitalist system.

THE PLIGHT OF THE ELDERLY IN SOUTH KOREA



Trotskyist Platform

An elderly working class man doing it tough in South Korea: it is common to witness many resorting to collecting recyclables for petty cash in a country where an aged pension is virtually non-existent.

I was catching a taxi to the nearest bus station to travel to Daegu, a city of industry and technology. The taxi driver was a middle aged man and he was curious about my accent so I told him I was from Australia and he responded by telling me that Australia was a "good country." I was wondering what he thought was that "good" about the imperialist nature and colonial origins of wealth in Australia but he then started to talk about the plight of the elderly in South Korea, something he was obviously very worried about. He said that a big problem in South Korea was the high rate of suicide amongst the elderly in the country. He was very aware that Australia was a so-called social democratic 'welfare state' that has some sort of welfare system and assistance for the elderly in place in contrast to the right-wing South Korean system where traditional Confucianist family principles dominate and there is

very limited social welfare. I expressed my sympathy with him about the fact that there needs to be lots changed in South Korea towards providing assistance for the elderly. But without much time left, I quickly explained how Australia won a social welfare state and basic free health care as a result of workers' struggles, also mentioning how Australia likewise has lots of changing to do especially around the issue of xenophobia and attitudes to migrant workers. If I had more time, I would have explained that Australia is an imperialist country where racism is a big problem. That the system and media scapegoat migrant workers so much that it often leads to racist attacks on migrants. That a system that has been founded on a white supremacist agenda of colonialism has always been racist towards the Aboriginal people. That the socio-economic disadvantages suffered by Aboriginal people stems from the historical and ongoing bloody theft of their property and that even to this day Aboriginal people die in state custody at a terrifying rate due to the brutality of the capitalist police. That Australian-owned businesses super-exploit the toilers of Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbours and that some of the crumbs of this looting finds its way into funding social services within Australia and that, nevertheless, despite this hundreds of thousands of people in Australia live in abject poverty and are forced to skip meals and skip prescription medication just to get by on welfare.

Whilst I was in South Korea, everywhere I went the plight of the most disadvantaged elderly was visible. I encountered many elderly people salvaging recyclable paper, cans and plastics. Even in the morning at 2am and up to the midday rush hour you could witness the sight of fragile elderly people pulling large carts of recyclables. One of my relatives would enthusiastically tell me how one kilo of cardboard would get you about thirty cents and sixty cents for quality paper. He thought it was a normal part of society and a legitimate way for the elderly to make a living if they cannot be supported by family or find employment.

A huge amount of elderly people in South Korea are self-employed due to the discrimination they face in a country where youth unemployment is also quite high. The elderly often sell

petty goods as street vendors: sunglasses, hats, vegetables. My grandmother's brother lives to this day in a storage facility where chillies are stored, dried and powdered. It was saddening seeing that his residence is a small office converted into a tiny, though nevertheless still comfy, little residence.

Compare the impoverished elderly in South Korea to their North Korean counterparts where under the ruling Workers Party of Korea there are adequate pensions and most importantly housing is collectivised by the workers' state effectively eradicating homelessness. Once, I read in a social policy study, itself quite conservative and loyal to capitalism, how South Korea has a very low aged pension because it is a developing economy compared to Japan and Europe and so it couldn't possibly spare the resources to adequately help the aged. But South Korea, with huge monopolies like Hyundai, LG, and Samsung is fabulously rich in comparison to North Korea which suffers under the weight of severe economic sanctions. Surely, South Korea is a nation of much wealth and can share this with the aged regardless or not if it is as advanced as Japan or Europe. But it is inherently a socialist system that can help the aged and capitalism which, as always, resists working class justice will need to be swept away with a socialist revolution.

SEOUL AND HOMELESSNESS

I travelled by high speed train from Daegu to Seoul Station and, yes, South Korea has a decent transport system compared to Australia, largely in part because Korea is a highly urbanised society. When I arrived at Seoul Train Station it was breathtaking. It was huge and modern, there were restaurants, stores and several supermarkets incorporated inside the train station. When I walked outside onto the streets of Seoul, the city night sky was illuminated with neon lights, shiny and towering sky scrapers, it resembled a modern capitalist capital city. I then walked into the underground train station of an undoubtedly busy and crowded city where there were queues of people as they left the station and entered it.

But with all the supposed glories of capitalism for the capitalists in South Korea as so often shown in the TV dramas and the K-pop

music sensations, the sight of inequality was very evident as well. The capital city's train station was also full of people without a home to return to. There were many people begging and with blankets on the ground at the train station. It seemed many were too ashamed to beg, they didn't bother begging at all, and if they did, they hung their head in shame and wouldn't dare look around. One section of the Seoul subway had over thirty people sleeping and resting in one stretch of the station. I took a picture of this and showed my young cousin. He gasped and went silent, he was so shocked by this picture.

But strangely, even my non-communist parents acknowledge the glory days of the 1960s in North Korea, the same time my parents talk about unspeakable poverty in South Korea during their upbringing and when sexism towards women was so rife that even my grandparents were ashamed to have too many daughters. It was then that the capitalists feared the popularity of the socialistic DPRK amongst the South Korean masses for they knew that the DPRK had advanced far ahead of South Korea in both social welfare and economic development and so the U.S. imperialists - and later their Japanese counterparts - poured a truly massive amount of aid into the South Korean economy. Furthermore, worried that further immiseration of the South Korean masses could see the country go communist, the Western and Japanese imperialists decided not to exploit South Korea in the same way they did other ex-colonies. This allowed South Korea to industrialise in a way that is atypical for a capitalist ex-colonial country.

But today's homelessness in South Korea is in stark contrast to the system in the pro-working class North Korea where the landlords were expropriated of their land and industry, taken away from them to be collectivised under a socialistic system where the organised and cooperative socialist ways brought about rapid increases in production and standards of living for the working class. North Korea to this day has jobs guaranteed and housing as a right, all whilst it is being terribly squeezed by massive imperialist military and economic pressure. It is exactly because of North Korea's socialistic ways that the imperialists and capitalists

have stationed around 30,000 US military forces and numerous military bases in South Korea and Japan.

It is a shame such a rich, advanced country like South Korea with companies like Samsung and Hyundai run by billionaires cannot adequately house its homeless nor provide adequate pensions for its working class people. What an utter shame and it is the workers' movement and the future workers' party which will be the antidote for the failure of a capitalist system in meeting people's needs.

PROTEST FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS

When I was in South Korea I learnt many of my relatives worked unusually long hours. I was surprised that two of my relatives that work in childcare worked ten hours a day. Today, workers in South Korea are known to work the most hours in the world and this is the case because of the culture of the authoritarian capitalist government of the past and what to this day is a draconian capitalist regime that cracks down on workers' rights.

Even though the monopolies are very large in South Korea, they only employ a very small section of the workforce. There is a lot of informal employment, contracted employment and self-employment. Youth unemployment is said to be 8% - double the rate of unemployment - but if you add people who have given up looking for work or are studying it amounts to 22% of youth without work.

My first experience with protesters in South Korea came from a Ssangyong workers' rally. The rally was part of a Ssangyong workers' rights public space occupation very similar to the Occupy movement in strategy and political nature. This movement came about from the Ssangyong workers having waged a major heroic battle in 2009 to fight job losses where they occupied a Ssangyong factory and battled ruthless state forces and corporate mercenary thugs that attacked the picket and strike. These activists, although part of the workers' movement, were really small 'l' liberal activists with beliefs very similar to those of the occupy movement's *not-left-not-right* anti-ideology as well as the anarcho-pacifists here.

The rally went for a long time and people were seated, there was a stage where people sang songs and danced, balloons were sent into the sky, progressive parliamentarians and a liberation theologian gave speeches, all whilst riot police surrounded the square making sure the activists were “orderly” (South Korean riot police are known for their violent clashes with protesters.) While there I also met followers of Tony Cliff, the founder of the International Socialist Tendency, members of the group ‘Da Hamgae’ or ‘All Together’, their co-thinkers in Australia being Socialist Alternative and Solidarity. Cliffism emerged during the Korean War where opportunist socialists refused to oppose their own imperialists and refused to defend and support the North Korean workers state, resorting to labelling North Korea as state capitalist.

Overall, South Korean activism seemed all too similar to the Australian movement plagued with shallow, degenerated opportunist socialist groups, petty-bourgeois social democrats and liberals but South Korean activism is more aligned to the workers’ unions whereas in Australia liberals often fail to understand the role of exploited workers. In addition, in South Korea one group stood out: a small group whose members were very knowledgeable and not related to the Cliffite, social democratic and liberalist tendencies. These activists identified themselves as Leninist Trotskyist Socialists with major disagreements with one of the largest Union coalitions, the reformist-led KFTU (Korean Federation of Trade Unions.) They claimed to be a revolutionary workers’ party in the making.

SOUTH KOREA: A REVOLUTION IN WAITING

Today, South Korea is a capitalist country bordering a country - socialistic North Korea -technically still at war with the capitalist powers of the imperialist west and its allies. The capitalist rule in South Korea is notable for the brutal crackdown on workers’ struggles, allegiance to imperialism and ignorance of working class conditions. South Korea is a country subservient to the western imperialist warmongers with 30,000 permanent US



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Seoul's subway at 7pm where 33 or more homeless people are resting. This situation in South Korea is in stark contrast to that in its northern socialistic neighbour where housing has been expropriated from the landlords and collectivised to provide free public housing.

military forces and numerous military bases stationed to threaten Socialistic China and North Korea as well as its own historically militant working class. South Korea: a country that has grown industrially off the back of the exploited South Korean working class, a country that is ruled by the capitalist monopolies of the ultra-rich capitalists like Samsung and Hyundai. These are not the monopolies of the proletarian masses but of greedy ultra-rich individuals. When the struggle against the capitalists strengthens in South Korea in defiance of the increasing anti-communist sentiment against North Korea and China it will be our duty as international proletarians to resist all the capitalists and especially our own Australian capitalists, to join the socialistic North Korean and Chinese workers’ states and the South Korean exploited workers in solidarity against their capitalist-imperialist exploiters.



Above: South Korean Ssangyong workers armed with metal pipes during their 2009 industrial struggle with the car company. In South Korea workers have a strong history of resisting their exploiters and subsequently being brutalised by the capitalist state.

Below: Trotskyist Platform banner at the June 15 "Hands Off Syria" march.



DEFEND SYRIA FROM IMPERIALIST-IMPOSED REGIME CHANGE!



Sydney, June 15: Hundreds march through the streets of Sydney to oppose the NATO-backed Syrian "Rebels." Secular Syrian community members united together in the action with supporters originating from other parts of the Middle East as well as a core of anti-imperialist leftists. Trotskyist Platform had a contingent at the rally carrying the banner shown on the opposite page. There is also a slowly growing number of leftists who are not part of any group but are joining the Hands Off Syria rallies. This is despite most of the left groups in Australia – including Socialist Alternative, Solidarity and Socialist Alliance – supporting the imperialist-backed "Rebels." Especially as the massive scale of imperialism's drive to impose regime change on Syria becomes increasingly clear – via their "Free Syrian Army" proxies, their extreme religious fundamentalist allies and directly through U.S. and British special forces/intelligence operatives on the ground – any left group that either supports the "Rebels" or takes the cowardly position of neutrality is betraying the struggle against imperialism and thus also the struggle for socialism.



AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF NORTH KOREA AND ITS PEOPLE: BRAVELY BUILDING A FRIENDLY, SOCIALISTIC SOCIETY WHILE IN THE CROSS HAIRS OF IMPERIALISM



Trotskyist Platform

A scene from the 2012 Arirang performance hails the socialist alliance between North Korea and the Peoples Republic of China.

As my trip to North Korea approached, I started to feel excited. I was going to see for myself what this country was really like – this country that has been so vilified by the mainstream Western media.

I will not pretend that I went to North Korea with no pre-conceived ideas. This is unlike the Western capitalist media who pretend to

be “unbiased”, “neutral” observers who are supposedly “shocked” when they go to North Korea for an “investigative” report. Before I went to North Korea – or, as it is properly known, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea – I understood it to be a workers state. By this I understood that capitalist rule had been smashed in North Korea and a state defending socialistic, collectivised property to be ruling there. This represented a huge step forward for social progress and for the global struggle of socialism against capitalism. However, the way that the socialistic system was run in the DPRK was somewhat deformed from the way a truly socialist order would be run because the administration of the country was monopolised by a bureaucratic layer that kept the masses out of real decision making power. Nevertheless, the DPRK was courageously holding out for socialism in the face of both economic sanctions and the most intense military threats from U.S. imperialism and its South Korean capitalist and Japanese and Australian imperialist allies. I understood that this intense pressure on the DPRK brought hardship to the North Korean people and made the bureaucratic deformations to its socialistic system more significant. Yet despite these difficulties, as a workers state embodying great gains for the exploited and oppressed of the whole globe, the DPRK must be unconditionally defended from military or propaganda attacks by capitalist countries and from external or internal forces seeking to undermine socialistic rule there.

My experiences during my trip to the DPRK confirmed this analysis of the DPRK and, more importantly, the political conclusions about what socialists in the imperialist countries should do about issues concerning capitalist hostility to the DPRK. Yet, in the detail there were several things different in North Korea to what I had expected. I found that, although I had even prior to the trip rejected the Western mainstream media’s demonization of North Korea, the trip made me realise that even my own prior perceptions of the country had been distorted somewhat by the capitalist-owned media. So, the trip was very useful. And I encourage all those leftists serious about knowing what the DPRK is really like to go see for themselves too!

FRIENDLY FIRST IMPRESSIONS

To appreciate what my first impressions of the DPRK were, I have to speak about where my trip began: Sydney Airport. There I was subjected to the hostile attention that South Asian or Middle Eastern men travelling alone are often subjected to at Australian airports. This was first evident while I was dealing with the rude staff doing the hand luggage security check. After passing through there I was then accosted by an official saying he was going to perform a “random” search of me and my luggage for explosive and banned material. He passed me a piece of paper to read explaining what they would be doing to me. I told him that I didn’t need to read it as I had read it many times before as I always get stopped for these “random” searches. The racial “profiling” that takes place at Australian airports is just one indication of the racist nature of current Australian society. But racism is evident in all capitalist societies. For in such societies the ruling capitalist class must scapegoat racial minorities in order to ensure that working class anger at the unemployment, inequality and social decay caused by capitalism is diverted away from them. The racist prejudices that these *divide and conquer* tactics spew out seep into every corner of society, especially into the law enforcement institutions which are, after all, instruments for maintaining the capitalist status quo.

Why all this is significant is that the reception I received first at Beijing Airport and then at Pyongyang, in the DPRK capital, was completely different from the treatment that I copped at Sydney Airport. When passing through Beijing Airport for a three day intermediate stay in China, I was treated courteously and no differently from other passengers. This had been the case as well during my first visit to China a few years ago. I received the same respectful treatment when I entered North Korea as well. There was not the slightest sign of racial prejudice from the DPRK airport authorities.

Furthermore, the ruthless strictness that has been painted onto the image of the DPRK state by the Western media was not evident, either, when I passed through Immigration and Customs at Pyongyang Airport. To be sure, the DPRK has good reason to

be worried about hostile forces entering the country. After all, the capitalist powers and those that serve their interests are doing everything in their power to destroy the workers state there. They not only seek to infiltrate people to spy on the DPRK militarily but perhaps more insidiously seek to send people to organise and stir up counterrevolutionary movements there. Such people are often sent in under the guise of staff of various “NGOs.” Thus, the DPRK has a rule restricting foreigners from bringing in radio communication equipment and mobile phones. We were told this beforehand and also told that we could lock our mobile phones in a locker at the airport and then pick them up on our way out. That is what I did. By the way, mobile phone use by North Koreans themselves is widespread. Furthermore, from major hotels it is easy to make international calls out of the DPRK.

DPRK Customs did put passengers’ luggage through X-ray machines and briefly opened a bag of mine. However, the contrast in their behaviour to the Australian Customs was striking. There was none of the threatening, “Did you pack these bags yourselves?” questions delivered in an aggressive tone. Instead, the DPRK officials were friendly and even jovial in their manner. Some of the Customs officials were giggling when they saw me because, unbeknownst to me until then, I had my t-shirt on inside out (I got ready in such a rush!)

This first impression of the DPRK turned out to be an impression that stayed with me throughout my trip. Everywhere I went the DPRK was a country of smiles – of friendly and relaxed people. The society is polite – an inheritance from the time of the Japanese occupation is that people still bow when they meet each other – but also very warm. Not only would North Korean people greet you – and more significantly – greet *each other* with smiles but in the interactions I observed during the entire trip I never saw any of the abusive or threatening behaviour or cynicism often seen in the streets of Australia or other capitalist countries.

The socialistic mode of production in the DPRK has affected the way people interact with each other. Everyone is guaranteed jobs there. To be sure, there is still competition in many facets of the DPRK



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North Korean children during a school excursion.

life – in sports, for places at prestigious music and arts institutes, for entry to universities and for work promotions. However, the competition for scarce jobs – whereby if you are unlucky enough not to succeed you end up without a livelihood – that exists in all capitalist countries is unknown there. Furthermore, instead of the economy being subject to the savage “logic” of dog-eat-dog competition between rival business bosses, all the key means of production of the DPRK are under collective, public ownership and are directed according to a plan to meet overall social goals. The collectivist mode of production in turn creates a collectivist spirit amongst the population and the friendly interaction between people that I observed during my trip to the DPRK.

Another feature of the collectively-owned economic mode is the creation of a society with very little crime. Why I was sure that there was little crime in North Korea was not because the tour guides told me so. Rather, it is because as we went around all over the large city of Pyongyang and over parts of the rest of the country, I could see not only bicycles left unlocked but bags often left completely unattended with no one around. Try that in an Australian city and you will either see your bag stolen or, if you happen to leave it in the wrong place ... the bomb squad and dozens of police surrounding it!

ENJOYING LIFE

In many ways, the people of the DPRK are just like other people all around the world. They are certainly far from the image created by the Western media of a brainwashed population with no pursuit in life other than to praise their leaders. Walking or touring around the DPRK, a common site that one can see is children playing on swings and slides. When I was at the aquarium in Pyongyang I observed teenage schoolgirls behaving just like their counterparts in many parts of the world. These mischievous, giggling girls were far more interested in checking out the boys visiting the aquarium than the dolphins. Meanwhile, the stories that DPRK people told me of their lives were very “ordinary” stories. One man spoke of how he was heartbroken when his girlfriend left him for another man while he was away serving in the army. He told of how he would have nothing to do with her for a long time but that after they both married different partners the two families became friends. Another man related tenderly of how he first became intimate with his then girlfriend, now wife, after they both saw a horror movie together.

So what do people in the DPRK do in their spare time? If you fell for the impression created by the capitalist media you would think that North Koreans spend all their non-working hours marching in military parades. However, actually the DPRK people enjoy a rich choice of cultural and leisure pursuits. North Koreans love their music – especially the beautiful Korean classical, light semi-classical and folk music genres. In public transport and in the streets one can often hear such music blaring away. Like in other parts of Asia, karaoke is also big in North Korea. From trips to schools and crèches organised as part of the tour, it was evident that children in the DPRK are really encouraged to nurture their musical talents. I saw a great musical performance by pre-school children at a crèche. The tour also took us to a centre for artistic excellence, called the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace, where the most talented students from different schools come to develop their artistic abilities. There I saw the students give a brilliant musical performance for visiting guests. Also at this school and at various fine arts and culture museums I witnessed



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Young musicians practice at the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace – a centre of excellence where the most talented students from different schools in North Korea come to develop their artistic abilities.

the many other art forms popular in the DPRK including painting, calligraphy, wood carving, doll making and embroidery.

I was surprised how much the DPRK opens up to Western cultural influences. Take, for instance, the biggest thing on the music scene in the DPRK right now, the Moranbong band – a group of supremely talented, all-female vocalists and instrumentalists. As well as playing stunningly beautiful Korean traditional, folk, classical and semi-classical tunes, the Moranbong also play Western classical and pop tunes. Among their numbers was a great instrumental version of *My Way*, the theme from the Rocky movie and Walt Disney tunes like *Small World*. Indeed, as our bus driver was really into this band he had a video of one their concerts playing on a small screen at the front of bus and I could see that they even had Walt Disney characters like Mickey Mouse dancing on the stage during part of the concert! By the way, there are Youtube postings of some of the Moranbong Band concerts too. See, for example, this one where current leader Kim Jong-Un joins the audience: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-18uvCUZfe0>. Another thing

that I noticed was that at the Karaoke place that I went to, among the tracks that were available to be selected were Western pop classics from the likes of the Beatles, Cliff Richard and Elvis. It was kind of nice to see North Koreans proudly sporting their Kim-Il Sung and Kim Jong-Il badges singing the likes of the Beatles' *Hey Jude* to karaoke. The fact is that people in the capitalist West are far more censored from access to the DPRK's culture than the other way around.

As well as music and the other fine arts, the DPRK is also big on sports and for a developing country of its size, it actually excels in sports. In last year's Olympic Games, the DPRK came a very respectable twentieth on the medal tally and was fourth among what would be classed as "developing countries" behind only China, Cuba and athletics powerhouse, Jamaica. Near the hotel I was staying at, which was located to the west of the Pyongyang city, there were enormous sports pavilions – one dedicated to each sport. Often I would see huge crowds of athletes gathering outside the pavilions.

Perhaps the biggest rage in North Korea right now is attending amusement parks and theme parks. It seemed that everywhere you went there was such a fun park nearby or under construction. And those fun parks that were already operating were just teeming with excited people. I went into one amusement park and it was really very similar to such parks in Australia with various breathtaking rides as well as dodgem cars. Ten pin bowling and pool is also popular in North Korea. At the ten pin bowling centre that I went to there were also pokies machines upstairs – the machines allow people to play for very small amounts of money.

Another popular pastime in North Korea is going on nature walks. As I saw during a trip from Pyongyang to the border with South Korea near Kaesong city, North Korea is a land of great natural beauty. Rain and summer weather meant the land was lush green when I was there. I went with the tour group on a nature walk to a hill near Pyongyang called Dragon Mountain. Looking down at Pyongyang through the mist and low cloud, you can see what a picturesque city the DPRK capital is. Built on either side

of the Taedong river that meanders through the heart of the city, Pyongyang is a city of clean air, perfectly manicured parks and lawns and beautiful public buildings.

Upon my return home, some people asked me what North Korean TV was like. I cannot answer that question. There were so many other things to do that I basically had no time for watching television. The glimpses of TV that I did see were from TV screens at bars and restaurants. On these occasions they were showing live the London Olympics (which was still running during the first part of the trip) and then later replays of Olympic events. And they did not shy away from broadcasting Olympic events won by American and British athletes.

For the most part, however, I was flat out with trips to musical shows, to the myriad of cultural centres that exist within North Korea, to schools, crèches, factories, monuments and fun parks. I especially enjoyed attending a dolphin show at Pyongyang's Aquarium and seeing the Circus. Both performances were terrific. However, I was especially interested in the crowd reaction. At both performances the audience was rather expressive, sometimes individually calling out things in Korean that I didn't understand. The circus clown act was greeted with immense roars of laughter at particular moments. I observed that, in general, the people of the DPRK have a great sense of humour. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see North Koreans in the streets sharing a joke with each other or lightly mocking their friends.

This was slightly different from what I had expected. I, of course, knew that the mainstream Western media's portrayal of North Koreans was absolute rubbish. The media portrayed North Koreans as a people so brainwashed and repressed that they acted like emotionless robots walking around chanting the virtues of the DPRK's *Juche* ideology. However, I had expected that given the ever present threat of being attacked by the fearsome array of U.S. military forces stationed across the border in South Korea and in the nearby Yellow Sea, Okinawa and Japan and given the hardships brought by such military strangulation and by harsh economic sanctions, the DPRK people would have developed a



A juggling act during a performance of the popular Pyongyang Circus.

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more reserved and perhaps stoic type of character.

After all, the horror that the U.S., its South Korean puppets and its imperialist allies like Britain and Australia inflicted during the 1950-53 Korean War is still very much in the collective memory of the people of North Korea. The U.S. and its allies killed two million North Korean people during that war. They used napalm to incinerate entire North Korean cities like Pyongyang. They even unleashed biological warfare against North Korean villagers by dropping bombs containing thousands of disease-carrying insects.

During my trip to the DPRK, I saw how the threat of another *all out* imperialist assault continues to haunt the North Korean people. The tour took us to the abandoned village of Panmunjom near the border with South Korea. Here, the building where the 1953 armistice that formally ended the Korean War was signed still stands. Yet walk just a few yards further and you see how the Korean War has never really ended. Looking across the blue huts (used for discussions) at the exact border between the two Koreas, you see the glitzy looking white building known as "Freedom House" which the U.S. and South Korean forces control. On the upper deck of this Orwellian-named structure, you can see the myriad of surveillance cameras that the U.S. and South Korea use to spy on people on the Northern side of the border. During the somewhat eerie walk across the demilitarised zone to this



U.S./South Korean building with spy telescopes at the tense border between capitalist South Korea and socialistic North Korea. North Koreans live under constant military and economic pressure from U.S. imperialism and its allies.

border and back it really hits you that this small country called the DPRK is standing up to the most powerful and ruthless military juggernaut in the world – standing up to the capitalist superpower that directly devastated Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and indirectly, via its “rebel” “Free Syrian Army” proxies, is bringing such suffering now to Syria.

Within Pyongyang, itself, there was a striking symbol of the DPRK’s defiance of imperialism. There on the banks of Taedong River lies the USS Pueblo, a U.S. spy ship captured by the DPRK in January 1968. The ship had repeatedly entered DPRK waters near the city of Wonsan on North Korea’s East Coast. However, it was eventually chased by DPRK boats and then boarded and captured by North Korean troops. During the operation, two of the spy ship’s crew were killed but the other 82 crewmen were captured. Initially, the U.S. tried to claim that the ship was merely conducting surveying. This was hilarious since when you board the ship, which has now been turned into a museum, you can see all the communication and signal processing equipment used for spying. Eventually, the crew confessed that they were indeed spying. Despite Washington issuing threats as they tried to get back the crew and ship, the DPRK stood firm. The whole incident ended in humiliation for

the U.S. imperialists. The U.S. government was forced to sign a confession and apology before the crew were released and allowed to walk one by one across the border into South Korea. However, the DPRK kept the ship as punishment as well as a trophy. Decades later, they secretly moved the ship into Pyongyang.

Of course, there is a very significant difference between the situation the DPRK faces today from the environment that existed at the time of the Pueblo incident. Back then the DPRK was protected by a socialistic superpower, the USSR, which by that time had achieved close to the military strength of the U.S. Today, the DPRK lacks such protection. To be sure, the DPRK’s alliance with the socialistic Peoples Republic of China (PRC) has up to this point deterred an all out imperialist attack on her. However, the PRC, while a rapidly growing power, is still a long way behind the strength that the USSR had relative to the imperialist powers. Furthermore, while shielding the DPRK from direct attack, the PRC’s wavering leadership is far from unequivocal and resolute in its support for the DPRK. This makes the DPRK more vulnerable than it was 45 years ago and its defiance of imperialism all the more admirable.

Indeed, since I made my trip, the pressure on the DPRK has intensified further. At the insistence of the U.S.A and the likes of Britain, Japan and Australia, the United Nations has imposed additional sanctions on the DPRK. Then on March 1, the US and its allies like Australia joined with the servile South Korean regime in conducting the biggest military exercises ever seen on the Korean Peninsula. These “exercises” were ostentatiously aimed at intimidating the DPRK and included nuclear warships and stealth bombers armed with nuclear weapons. Even after that “exercise” ended on April 30, the U.S. and South Korea launched at least two more major exercises in the following month, both including ships from the U.S. Nimitz aircraft carrier group.

Yet, somehow, don’t ask me how but somehow in the face of all the challenges resulting from incessant imperialist pressure, DPRK citizens have managed to maintain a relaxed, light-hearted and vibrant outlook on life.

NORTH KOREA: OPEN FOR TOURISM

The good humoured and laid back atmosphere in the DPRK was not the first surprise I had during my trip. Indeed, my first surprise about North Korea occurred before I even landed there when I was still at Beijing Airport. There, as I was queuing to check in to my Air Koryo (the North Korean airlines) flight, I noticed the large number of Westerners queuing up to get on the same flight. This was in addition to the tiny tour group that I was part of. The number of overseas visitors that I saw about to enter the DPRK was quite a surprise to me. You see, when I told personal and work friends back here that I was going to the DPRK they thought I was being really “out there.” This reaction affected me, I think, so that even though I was travelling to the DPRK out of sympathy for this country, it is possible that my head had swelled slightly at the exotic notion that I would be one of the few Westerners visiting the DPRK. The sight of large numbers of Westerners queuing up for the flight to Pyongyang quickly deflated such thoughts.

It turned out that the Air Koryo flight that I took was just one of three from Beijing to Pyongyang that day. Air Koryo has an agreement with the Peoples Republic of China’s state-owned national carrier, Air China, such that each airline has flights on this route on alternate days. In North Korea, itself, I found that there was a very large number of tourists and our tour group’s minibus kept coming across large buses owned by the KITC (Korea International Travel Company) that were packed with tourists. It was summer in North Korea and thus the tourist season. Indeed, there were so many tourists that Pyongyang’s many hotels were booked out and our tour group ended up staying in a hotel slightly outside the city.

So who were these visitors? Most seemed to be from Britain, France, Sweden, Germany and the United States. Prior to my trip, I had expected that most visitors to North Korea from Western countries would be people like me – socialists visiting out of some sort of political solidarity with the DPRK. Yet of the many other tourists that I spoke to, only one European guy who said he was a communist and one Brazilian guy who I saw on the plane back to Beijing wearing communist symbols could be put in this category.



North Koreans take photos at the Pyongyang Aquarium.

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Most of the other Western tourists visiting North Korea turned out to be just that ... tourists. They just wanted to visit another country see what it was like and enjoy its scenic and unique spots. There did appear to be, however, also another special type of tourist visiting the DPRK. I ran into some people who were classical music enthusiasts who came to North Korea largely to enjoy its mesmerizingly beautiful music. Other Europeans I met were interested in the fine arts more broadly and in Korean culture. Staying in the same hotel as our tour group was a large group of Korean Studies students from Cambridge University in Britain. These young people really were very Cambridge: I overheard two of them in the elevator having a very earnest debate about whether a certain Korean dish they just ate originated in the 17th or the 16th century or was it the 18th century versus the 17th century!

Then there were visitors from other parts of North East Asia. I ran into a large group of school girls who were from the Korean minority living in Japan. They were specialising in the fine arts and were in the DPRK for a year to learn Korean music, arts and culture. Of course, the largest groups of overseas visitors in the DPRK were from North Korea’s Chinese ally. There were Chinese workers and technicians working for shorter or longer periods at Chinese-owned enterprises or as technical specialists assisting DPRK ones. Then there were also thousands upon thousands of Chinese tourists. In the hotel we were staying at there was a tour group from a women’s unit of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army.



Pedestrians around an entrance to a Pyongyang underground metro railway station.

MYTHS AND REALITIES

So the commonly held view in Australia and other Western countries that “it is almost impossible to get into North Korea” turned out to be a myth. Yet that is hardly the only myth about the DPRK created by the Western mainstream media. One common line you here about the DPRK is that the streets are deserted and that there is hardly anyone outside. This is quite a laughable claim for anyone who actually goes there. From packed musical halls, circuses, aquariums, arts and scientific museums to theme parks, sports stadiums and karaoke bars brimming with excitement, Pyongyang is a lively city. The one day that was indeed relatively quiet when I was there was one rainy Sunday. Otherwise, Pyongyang’s metro train stations are busy and its trams are crowded to the point of being a squeeze. Look around the streets and you will see people walking about in groups or as individuals, children playing in small parks and sportswomen and sportsmen in training jogging about.

Associated with the “North Korea’s streets are deserted” myth is the “there are no vehicles on the road in North Korea” claim. Boy, did I have fun with this one! You see, when I told a co-worker I

was going to North Korea he said that my tour bus would be the only vehicle I would see on the road. This guy is a good person with a lot of integrity with whom I get on well. He is also a fellow trade union member but he believes far too much of what he hears from the mainstream Western media. His assertion to me about the traffic in North Korea was based on a claim he heard on BBC. I responded, “Brother let’s have a bet then , I bet you I can take a photo in North Korea with more than two vehicles on the road.” My co-worker thought about this for a while and then realised that maybe the BBC were exaggerating a bit and thus declined the bet. So I said to him, “You nominate a number and I bet I can take a photo on a North Korean street with at least that number of vehicles.” In the end we settled on seven.

I knew I was going to win this bet. But even I was surprised at how easily. As I went from Pyongyang Airport to the hotel, I was laughing my head off as I saw the number of other cars on the road. I could not wait to get back to work just to show my friend the photos. Later, on weekday peak hours, our bus was even slowed down in Pyongyang mini-traffic jams. Fortunately, peak hour there is not as bad as in Sydney. Nevertheless, I would estimate that peak hour traffic in Pyongyang as being roughly equivalent to Sydney traffic on weekdays between peak hours.

To be fair to my friend, people there told me that the number of cars on the road has increased significantly over the last few years – a symbol of the steadily growing North Korean economy. However, the reality of the claim that “there are hardly any vehicles on the roads in North Korea” shows just how much the imperialist media can manipulate the population in the Western countries. To be sure, the BBC could easily find a particular highway in North Korea to film where at a particular moment there in the daytime there were no other vehicles in sight. Yet, the same could be said about particular moments on the Yass to Harden road, the Parkes to Dubbo road, the Tamworth to Armidale road or indeed most other country highways in Australia!

This media lie about the traffic in North Korea is symptomatic of their other lies about the country. Perhaps the biggest lie of all



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Heavy traffic in Pyongyang. The western mainstream media claims that there are hardly any cars on the road in North Korea.

was the claim that the country's population was starving. From my travels during my trip and having passed a very large number of people, I can say that I did not see any signs of mass starvation in the country. People I passed looked healthy and fit. Now, if you understood the predicament that the DPRK faces, you might indeed expect to see malnutrition in parts of its population. The DPRK is strangled by crippling imperialist economic sanctions and is bled dry by the constant imperialist military threat giving her no choice but to spend a large proportion of her resources on defence. Yet I did not see any evidence of malnutrition.

I did see indicators that the DPRK was probably only just meeting its food requirements. This I deduced from the fact that apart from one plump boy I saw at a kindergarten, almost no one there was overweight. In a statistical distribution within a population where there was a large excess of food, you would expect there to be a percentage of the population that was overweight. Yet it was a credit to the DPRK that despite the strangling grip of imperialism and the resulting difficulty in meeting its overall food requirements, the society still basically managed to provide enough food for each of its people. They have achieved this through a relatively egalitarian distribution of income and possibly also

through a degree of rationing. I noticed that apart from special meals together, our guides and driver ate separately to us. They had simpler meals than us visitors but still adequate ones. That is a far, far cry, however, from the claim that the North Korean people are starving. Indeed, what is striking about the DPRK is that compared to other developing countries you do not see malnourished, emaciated people around. This is very different from, say, capitalist India where according to UNICEF, 47% of children under the age of three are underweight due to malnourishment and UN estimates indicate that 2.1 million children die each year before reaching the age of five – mainly due to preventable illnesses.

In fact, I did not see a single homeless person or anyone begging while I was in the DPRK. This is not only markedly different from "Third World" capitalist countries like India or the Philippines but different from Australia too where a Saturday afternoon trip down George Street in Sydney City will make you realise just how many people are suffering homelessness in this "lucky country."

There was, however, a period in the mid-1990s when North Korea indeed went through a famine. The destruction of the USSR through capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92 left the DPRK extremely vulnerable. At that time the DPRK's sole remaining big country ally, the PRC, was much weaker than it is now. U.S. imperialism ramped up the pressure forcing the relatively tiny DPRK to expend costly amounts in maintaining a military deterrent. This combined with economic isolation and natural disasters to devastate the economy. Some North Koreans spoke openly of how the country came to the brink of collapse in this period. To put things in perspective, however, although there was terrible suffering in this period and North Korea's life expectancy plunged it never actually fell below the level of capitalist India. With brave efforts and a mutually beneficial economic relationship with rapidly growing socialistic China, the North Korean people slowly pulled themselves up from that crisis and in the last few years economic re-development in the DPRK has continued at an increased pace.

Indeed, imperialist-dominated agencies' own statistics contradict imperialist claims that North Korea's citizens are starving today.



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A common sight in North Korea – children having fun at a playground.

Thus, the United Nations World Health Organisation estimates for the year 2011 put the DPRK's life expectancy at 68.8 years. This is not only several years higher than that of capitalist India but almost exactly the same as that in the Russian Federation.

Now after I related some of my experiences of my trip back to people here I realised just how powerful constant bombardment with media propaganda can be. And how people will believe what they want to, shaped by their perceived political interests, regardless of the facts. Thus, one nice young woman of an upper-middle class background informed me that the reason I saw happy, well-fed people in North Korea was that they were ... all actors! Now I have heard some *way out* conspiracy theories in my time but this one boy, it would take some co-ordination to pull that one off! After all, during my extensive travels all over Pyongyang and its public spots, to nearby cities and to the South Korean border I would have passed literally hundreds of thousands of people. Some of the routes we took were totally unplanned – ironically, precisely because of the challenges that the DPRK still faces as a developing country. For when I was there, North Korea was hit

with devastating floods that not only caused loss of life but forced many road closures. Thus, our mini-bus ran into many dead ends and was forced to take side routes to get to our destinations. Yet, maybe this anti-communist woman was right. Maybe, in fact, 99% of North Korea's citizens are simply actors who have been specially given adequate food, good education and access to a rich cultural and social life just so that they can fool visitors about the true state of the country which is in fact only "truly" represented by a 1% of the population hidden away from view! Yet, if the overwhelming majority of people are able to "act" as a happy, adequately fed, well-educated and culturally enriched people then maybe this isn't the biggest blockbuster ever staged even bigger than *Ben Hur* but rather an, albeit deformed, yet nevertheless proud example of a functioning workers state!

Indeed, despite all the pressure from the U.S. and its allies, North Korea was far from the crumbling country depicted by the capitalist media. Things generally worked there. The airline, Air Koryo, was efficient with good service. The trams ran fine and the Pyongyang subway was great. All the public cultural buildings and parks were kept beautifully maintained and clean. To be sure, the economic difficulties caused by sanctions and hostile pressure were evident too. There was obviously a shortage of either fuel or spare parts as agriculture was still largely conducted by hand. I only saw one tractor while I was in the DPRK. Similarly, road and rail works were not mechanised. In the rural areas most people relied on bicycles or walking for travel. On the other hand the technical and scientific level was such that when the DPRK was able to devote resources to a project, it was able to operate with a good degree of technical efficiency. Thus, we were taken to some factories – including the Taedonggang Tile Plant, the Taean Friendship Glass Factory and the Taedonggang Brewery – that were obviously operating at a very high technological level. This is a reflection, too, of the fact that the DPRK once had an overall advanced industrial economy prior to the isolation and hardships resulting from the destruction of its Soviet ally. You could see the difficulties of the last two decades reflected in the old looking housing in many places. Yet the emergence of several new housing

complexes with nice-looking high-rise buildings is a sign of the economic upturn of recent years. Meanwhile, many of the facilities in public cultural buildings that I visited in the DPRK, like a centre of music excellence called the Hana Music Information Center, a library/learning centre known as the Grand People's Study House, the Pyongyang Circus ring and the museums are of higher quality than their equivalents in Australia. Indeed, the futuristic looking May Day stadium built in 1989 is the largest stadium in the world.

Perhaps the most striking refutation of the Western media lie that North Korea is a country falling part was the way in which its people conducted entertainment/cultural performances. The most spectacular of such performances that I saw was the Arirang performance at the May Day stadium. This was a truly unique event – a magnificent musical, dancing and gymnastics extravaganza literally involving tens of thousands of performers. It told the story of the DPRK and Korea more broadly using as a backdrop the beautiful Korean folk song Arirang. The Arirang song tells the



A scene from North Korea's Arirang festival where thousands of people take part in a beautifully choreographed combination of dance, music, gymnastics and drama. The background which changes throughout the performance is a mosaic created by 30,000 students holding flags.

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story of a young couple being torn apart by a greedy landlord and is used to represent the division of Korea.

The Arirang performance involved several acts occurring consecutively with thousands of performers participating in each act. Each successive act involved new sets of performers - or performers from an earlier act in fresh outfit - flooding into the stadium grounds to perform a new set of highly complex dance and/or gymnastic moves to music. The visual background to the performance is provided by a giant mosaic created by thirty thousand students holding large coloured cards which, in a brilliantly coordinated way, they rotate to change the resulting background image. Amazingly, the students were even able to make this human mosaic display moving images - like a sun or moon rising up through the sky. Since the Arirang performance occurs daily for several weeks in August to September, several groups of schools are assigned to provide the mosaic for different periods of the festival. Thus in all hundreds of thousands of students are involved throughout the festival. The point is that such a visually and acoustically stunning feast involving the magnificently creative and disciplined combination of music, dance, gymnastics, drama, choreography, lighting and logistics could hardly be pulled off by a society "that doesn't work", which is what the Western media portrays North Korea as.

"POLICE STATE"?

For me, perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Arirang Festival was what I observed after the actual performance ended on the night that I attended. Then, as we were walking away from the stadium I could see large streams of excited students and performers looking for their friends and families. You could see the joy and pride in their faces. They rightly felt that they were part of something spectacular.

As it was the season for the Arirang Festival when I visited the DPRK, you would sometimes see large groups of students in Pyongyang's city squares participating in Arirang practice sessions. On some occasions when we walked past them, I thought

we were disturbing their practice. However, many students would turn around and give us a smile and a wave. It was apparent that the atmosphere within the Arirang practice sessions was relaxed and light-hearted. Contrary to the imperialist media attempts to portray the DPRK's mass games as some sort of forced march, the participants were willing and proud performers in a superbly choreographed artistic and athletic extravaganza.

Indeed, it turns out that North Korea in general is very far from the repressive, totalitarian society depicted by the U.S. and Australian rulers. To be sure, there seems little doubt that any open political attacks on the DPRK's top leadership or attempts to openly build a rival to the ruling Workers Party of Korea – even from an alternative pro-communist standpoint – would be stopped. The DPRK communists, no doubt, think that given the extreme hostility North Korea faces from the imperialist powers and the neighbouring South Korean regime, they cannot allow anything that would enable counterrevolutionary forces to gain a foothold. However, whether prohibiting criticism and healthy debate from pro-communist tendencies helps this cause or not is discussed further below.

To put things in context, curbing political dissent is hardly unique to the DPRK. Not by a long shot. In U.S.-allied, capitalist Thailand there are many people serving long jail sentences or who have been driven into exile simply for criticising the king or even for raising the issue about whether the monarchy is even necessary. Just this January, magazine editor Somyot Pruksakasemsuk was sentenced to 11 years jail for allegedly insulting the king because he published two magazine articles about a fictional character that the court deemed represented the king. In capitalist Turkey which Washington hails as a “model of democracy” in the Middle East, thousands of protesters have been detained, thousands injured and at least four killed by the security forces and their allies so far during current anti-government protests. And for all the U.S. government's propaganda about repression in the DPRK, it is highly doubtful that the North Korean government does what the U.S. government has recently been proven to be doing: gathering and

storing the phone records of millions of customers and tapping into the central servers of internet companies to gain access to emails, photos and other files that allow the security agencies to track a person's movements and contacts. Meanwhile, in the U.S. neocolony of the Philippines, security agencies and right-wing death squads murder and “disappear” dozens of leftists, union organisers and peasant activists every year.



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A North Korean policewoman. Police in North Korea do not carry guns or even batons.

The security presence in the DPRK is, however, rather different from that in the capitalist Philippines. When I was in the Philippines about ten years ago, the presence of the security forces was very ostentatious and threatening. Every time you walked into a shopping centre or public building you and your bag were searched by armed guards. By contrast, in the DPRK I never actually saw anyone approached by the security forces in a probing way and there were no bag searches other than for when one was departing from the airport.

Of course, any comparison between the DPRK and the capitalist countries with regard to the nature of their state forces must begin with an understanding of the differing roles these state forces play. In the capitalist countries, like the Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, Bahrain, India, Australia, U.S., Mexico and Kenya the primary role of the state institutions is to protect the property of the wealthy capitalist class and to enforce the system of capitalist exploitation of workers. Thus, in Australia the police attack the pickets of striking workers – as construction workers at Grollo's Melbourne City site

experienced last year and as Sydney University workers viciously assaulted during their two recent strikes this year have found out. They also harass the homeless, brutalise leftist demonstrations like the Occupy Sydney protests and unleash racist terror against Aboriginal people. By contrast, in the DPRK and the other workers states the role of the security forces is to maintain the socialistic system based on communal, public ownership of the key sectors of the economy. To be sure, as the workers states in North Korea, China etc are currently bureaucratically deformed, to a degree the state organs also enforce some privileges for themselves and for the bureaucratic elite. Nevertheless, their primary function is to protect a social system that is favourable to the working class – that is a system where society-wide ownership of the strategic sectors of the economy is dominant.

Even understanding the basically progressive role that the security forces play in the DPRK, it is simply not true to say that these forces act there in an omnipresent, draconian manner – in what is colloquially known as a “police state.” Indeed, in many ways, North Korea is less a “police state” than Australia. Thus, during one’s normal travels here in Australia during a fortnightly period, one would typically see several episodes of police moving in to question/arrest people or with their cars parked outside a person’s home during a raid – especially if one resides or frequently passes through working class suburbs. By contrast, throughout my trip to the DPRK I can only ever remember one moment where I even saw the police on duty in a group of two or more. On that occasion the police in a rural area were heading towards the entrance of a home – however, I do not know whether it even had anything to do with questioning someone let alone an arrest. The fact is that while political expression independent of its leadership is thoroughly suppressed in the DPRK, those not interested in being politically active face very little state repression. It is worth noting that the police are not even armed in the DPRK. They merely have a stick to point at traffic plus a whistle. Many of the police in the DPRK are actually female traffic police more likely to cause harm by their beauty causing male heterosexually-inclined or female lesbian-inclined drivers to be distracted into an accident than by

any unjust repression!

In contrast to the police, the Korean Peoples Army (KPA) is certainly very visible in DPRK society. The KPA is a numerically large army which is what is necessary to deter or repel the ever present threat of attack by the U.S and its South Korean underlings. Yet you generally do not see the KPA soldiers armed except for at strategic locations – like outside the parliament building, at odd security boxes on key highways and obviously at the border with South Korea. At major factories there is usually a lone armed soldier posted at a checkpoint where in Australia that role would be played by private security guards hired by the company. Whenever I saw these factory-posted troops in the DPRK they were engaged in friendly conversation and sharing jokes with the workers at the plants.

Most of what you see KPA soldiers doing is tending to crops, engaging in road works and in rural areas helping people repair their bicycles. I also saw KPA personnel fixing broken down trucks and buses on the roads of rural areas. And because there is probably a shortage of spare parts resulting from the DPRK’s strangulation by imperialism, this was not a rare sight in the rural areas of the country.



A Korean Peoples Army (KPA) soldier and civilians on a ride at one of North Korea’s many amusement parks. North Korea’s civilian population is very relaxed around KPA soldiers.

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In general, the KPA blends almost seamlessly into the North Korean population. By looking at the demeanour of the people when KPA soldiers are around you can gather the relationship between the army and the people. I remember being back in Jaffna, in the Tamil heartland of Sri Lanka for a period when it was occupied by the Lankan Army. I remember how my uncles, aunts and cousins became scared and wary whenever we crossed paths with army trucks. No one would smile at the soldiers and there was almost no social interaction between the troops and the people. In Australian cities too, especially in working class suburbs, people tense up somewhat and become wary when they see the police. At most, people in these areas have cold interactions with the cops. Working class youth, especially “ethnic” youth, dislike the cops – and for good reason. Meanwhile, in areas with heavy concentrations of Aboriginal people, like Sydney’s Redfern, Australia’s racist police are, understandably, downright hated. In contrast, I observed that civilians in the DPRK do not change their behaviour at all when they see KPA soldiers around and there is plenty of social interaction between the KPA troops and the people. I recall especially how at the amusement park that I visited, civilians would be readily going into the mini-compartments of rides to be squashed in together with KPA soldiers.

There was, however, actually one occasion during my trip when I, as well as several DPRK citizens, did indeed have a run in with KPA troops. Where was this? At the dodgem cars at an amusement park! Two young KPA soldiers skilfully driving in a dodgem car were running into everyone else’s cars – including mine. However, I can proudly say that I got ‘em back. Sneaking behind to the left of their car, a quick turn ... and wham! Meanwhile, North Koreans in their dodgem cars were also busy ramming into the car of these soldiers. And I can say that these two KPA troops had just as big smiles when they were hit as when they were on the offensive. The interaction between KPA soldiers and North Korean civilians is hardly the interaction of an oppressor army and its subjects. If many Aboriginal and working class “ethnic” youth had a chance to visit North Korea, most would wish that the security forces in Australia be replaced by ones like in the DPRK.

TAKING IT EASY AT WORK



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Workers on the assembly line at the Taedongang Tile Plant. North Korea has a laid back working environment.

Associated with the lying media portrayal of North Korea as a cruel, totalitarian state is the claim often repeated by idiotic, anti-DPRK “leftists” in the West that North Korean workers are forced to work like something close to slave labourers. Nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, from what I saw, not only are the work conditions of DPRK workers excellent – although wages are low reflecting the overall low GDP of the country – but the country has, in fact, the opposite problem: that is, workers taking it too easy at work. I saw some examples of this. One was during a tour of the Taedongang Tile Plant. Before going on with my observation here, I should note that the guides during the visit to this factory were stressing the efficiency of the plant and part of the reason why foreigners were taken to such factories was to encourage foreign investment in the DPRK which the DPRK authorities are seeking to attract in a controlled way. And yet I noted that at certain nodes along the assembly line, the factory would have two workers at each location with one worker often chatting with the other worker. By contrast, in an equivalent Australian factory there would typically only be one process

worker at each node at a given time. Thus, in Australia as in other capitalist countries, process workers are usually stressed out trying to constantly keep up with the mind-numbing regime of the assembly line. In contrast, the arrangement in the North Korean tile plant was great for the workers – no wonder they all looked so relaxed! Any overseas capitalist on a tour of the factory would, however, be horrified at how laid back the workers were and at the level of over-staffing – no way would that encourage them to invest in North Korean factories!

When we were finishing up the tour of another factory, the Taean Friendship Glass Factory, we passed through a serene garden that turned out to be a workers' rest area. This rest area had an artificial pond, pagodas, seats, flower plants, trees and animal statues to make the area as pleasant as possible for workers during their meal breaks. The notable thing about this was that although the factory had state of the art machinery that the DPRK was proud of, its workforce was relatively small – a lot less than 200. The Australian worksites that I have worked in of larger size have never had anything approaching such a lovely, well-maintained rest area for workers. Perhaps even more significantly, the guide at the factory did not even mention the rest area as we quickly walked passed it back to our bus. It is only when I asked about it that the guide explained what it was. In other words, this was not such a big deal for DPRK workplaces, in general.

At the very hotel that I was staying in, I had another experience that pointed to the relaxed work conditions for North Korean workers. One afternoon I went to the shop at the hotel to buy a bottle of water, as I often did. However, on this occasion the shop, whilst open, was completely unattended. If anyone had wanted to they could have walked away with some of the many items on sale that included both basic convenience store goods as well as gift items like bottles of alcohol, dressy clothes and perfumes. So I went to the hotel desk to ask who I should pay the money to for my water. The clerk then told me to wait a moment and went to grab the saleswoman. It turned out that she had been at the hotel hairdresser getting her hair done. She came jogging out back

towards the shop and because she could not speak any English pointed to her hair to signal that she had been getting her hair done. All the surrounding hotel attendants burst into laughter and were teasing her in Korean. She had an apologetic look on her face to me but also a big smile. In other words, she had no fear that she was going to get disciplined for her lapse. A hotel worker doing that in Australia, in contrast, would likely expect to get a severe reprimand at the very minimum.

It is great that North Korean workers have such a pleasant and relaxed work environment and that is one indication that it is indeed a workers state. At the same time, we have to examine this issue differently depending upon whether we are looking at a workers state or a capitalist one. In a capitalist enterprise, if a worker for a period somehow manages to get away with taking it easy, what that mainly means is that the capitalist business owner that is exploiting her or him is able to sweat less profit out of that worker's labour than would otherwise be the case. So we think: good on that worker! In a state-owned enterprise in a workers state like the DPRK, however, lower labour productivity means less is produced for the whole of society. Thus, in workers states there needs to be a balance between ensuring the best possible work conditions for a given level of development of the country and the need for workers to be productive not only to provide consumer goods for all the people but to provide resources for health, education and the future development of the economy – the latter being crucial to making it harder for the imperialists to foment capitalist counterrevolution.

So how does a society go about ensuring labour productivity? Well, we know how it happens in capitalist countries like Australia. If you're not working your guts out then the capitalist boss will simply sack you! Of course, this might work for the technical elite who can expect both *a carrot and a stick* at the end of the day, that is some reward for their hard work, but punitive methods are not effective at all in harnessing the creative potential of the great mass of workers. Most workers understand that any good innovation they come up with will be simply usurped by the



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Typical housing in North Korean cities.

business owners and that their ambitious managers may even try to claim the credit for the idea. But how about in a worker state? How does such a state ensure labour productivity? After all, in such states, in the dominant state-owned enterprises, workers typically have, or have close to, guaranteed jobs and the enterprise managers' brief typically includes the requirement to maximise employment. That is, after all, why enterprises in the DPRK and the state-owned enterprises that form the backbone of socialistic China's economy are so overstaffed by capitalist standards. And it is why unemployment is virtually nil in the DPRK and perennially low in China. This is, of course, a very good thing. Yet without the compulsion of the *if you don't work hard you're out the door* discipline of capitalist enterprises, how can state-owned enterprises in a workers state ensure a productive workforce? Well, there are three methods. Firstly, there is the use of material incentives like bonuses and wage differentials to stimulate production. Secondly, there is moral pressure from fellow workers that sends a message to any slack worker that they are letting down their fellow workers throughout society. Thirdly, there is workers' own moral compulsion to work hard because

they know that doing so will serve their fellow people. Now, the first method has its drawbacks because it creates inequality and can create social tensions between workers. Yet the second and third method can only become truly dominant as the society gets closer to real communism and when most workers have acquired a deep understanding that the society does, indeed, belong to them and that they are obliged to work hard to collectively build it. Yet, currently in the workers states of the DPRK, China, Cuba etc because there is not genuine workers democracy in which workers have real political power over the administration of the country, workers' understanding that the society indeed belongs to them is below what it needs to be.

To be sure, it is not that the working class in the DPRK, China, Cuba etc have no sense that the state belongs to them. After all without that there would be absolutely no way that the workers states in these countries could have survived in the face of the intense hostility of the capitalist world, including that of the richest, most powerful countries on earth. Furthermore, without people's pride in the socialistic society, the DPRK would not have been able to develop its own technology to the extent that allowed it to last year join the exclusive club of countries that have been able to put a satellite up into space – even beating to the punch its capitalist South Korean rival which has had massive backing from Western imperialism. Moreover, the DPRK would not be able to pull off the Arirang festival or its many other events of cultural excellence without a motivated population. Yet it has to be admitted that aerospace challenges are exciting and fascinating and participating in cultural performances is pleasurable and uplifting. Thus, it is relatively easy to stimulate people to enthusiastically participate in these tasks. However, it is to motivate workers to energetically toil in the mundane, ceaseless drudgery of, say, an assembly line where the highest level of political consciousness is required. And it is here that any bureaucratic deformations in a workers state are most harmful as they distort workers' understanding that the state and the economy do, in fact, belong to them.



A luxury BMW vehicle in Pyongyang. Although differences in wealth are much less than in a capitalist country there is a privileged bureaucratic layer in North Korea that, for example, has access to prestige vehicles owned by government departments.

COMPARISONS WITH THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

The problem of boosting labour productivity in the DPRK was also shared by the former Soviet Union. Indeed there are many aspects about DPRK society that resemble what the ex-USSR was like. This is important to note because some half-baked Western leftists that are hostile to the DPRK, while now claiming some affinity to the ex-USSR, are fond of stating that the DPRK is something monstrous in comparison with the former Soviet Union.

Of course, comparisons with the ex-USSR must take into account that while the USSR became a superpower with a military and industrial strength able to seriously deter an all-out imperialist military attack, relatively tiny North Korea is in a far more vulnerable position. Nevertheless, the DPRK shares several of the many positive aspects of the ex-USSR as well as some of the problems.

The most notable of the latter is the privileges of the bureaucratic elite. To put things in perspective, however, overall the DPRK is a far more egalitarian society than any capitalist country. The material privileges of its bureaucratic layer are nothing even approaching the enormous wealth concentrated in the hands of tycoons like Gina Rinehart, Frank Lowy, James Packer, the Pratt family and Clive Palmer in capitalist Australia. Nevertheless, these privileges do exist. The most evident sign of these is the sight of luxury cars – including late model BMWs and Mercedes Benzs – driving around Pyongyang. To be sure, these cars are not actually owned by individuals but belong to government agencies. Nevertheless, the fact that some government officials are able to ride in such luxury vehicles when many, especially in rural areas, must rely on their feet alone goes against the egalitarian principles of communism.

There is one problem with the DPRK that did not exist in the former USSR workers state of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. And that is the existence of a personality cult around the family of founding leader Kim Il Sung, his late son Kim Jong Il and his grandson and present leader, Kim Jong Un. The reference to this personality cult in the Western media is about the only negative feature about DPRK society claimed by the imperialist media that is actually true. I did, nevertheless, get a different sense of this cult of personality when I was in the DPRK. I recall one moment when we were being taken on a visit of a centre for music training called the Hana Music Information Centre. The presenter for the centre was giving a presentation in Korean and one of our overall tour guides was translating this into English. When the presenter noted that Kim Jong Il had visited the centre only two days before he died, our guide broke down into tears and was not able to continue translating. It was genuine grief. The thing is that I know this woman to be a very intelligent person who speaks several languages, knows about the world and has travelled abroad. She certainly does not fit the Western media's caricature of North Korean citizens who love and idolize their leader – an insulting caricature that presents North Korean people as brainwashed half-wits.

Despite flaws in his political outlook, former DPRK leader Kim Il

Sung was indeed a communist revolutionary hero. While in exile in Manchuria, Kim Il Sung led guerrilla resistance to Japanese imperialism as a member of the Communist Party of China. Later, he served with and became a Major in the Soviet Red Army that helped to liberate the Northern part of Korea from Japanese occupation and capitalist rule. Although his son and grandson by contrast merely inherited power, many North Koreans have such strong affection for the Kim dynasty because they identify them as symbols of their own courageous defiance of imperialism. Previous leader Kim Jong Il was in charge when North Koreans went through great hardship in the mid to late 1990s in order to maintain their socialistic system in the face of great peril. For many North Koreans, all the pride and emotion about the hardships they together battled through in this period was transferred into support for Kim Jong Il.

Now, one could argue that the personality cult around the Kim family serves as a kind of unifying force for the DPRK. And that while religion in today's capitalist (and previous feudal and slave) societies is used to apologise for the subjugation of the masses by the exploiting classes, in the DPRK the religious-like adoration for the Kim dynasty, even if also used for maintaining the political rule of a privileged bureaucratic layer, mainly serves to buttress socialistic rule. The problem, however, is that by indentifying a system with a person, or in this case a family, it can make the system brittle. For it is then that a scenario like a scandal revealing embarrassing details about the leader or his family or a power struggle leading to the leader being toppled becomes capable of undermining support for the entire system. Furthermore, the personality cult discourages bold political initiative from the masses since only the great leaders and their chosen lieutenants are considered to be capable of supreme political wisdom. One of the few annoying things that I did find during my trip to the DPRK was that it was rare for DPRK revolutionary leaders outside the Kim family to be mentioned at all. The one exception was Kim Chaek. However, I found that he was referred to as having "helped Kim Il Sung" rather than as a communist leader in his own right.

A more robust way of mobilising support for the socialistic order is to organise the masses into a political administration based on workers' democracy and to channel their political energies to the cause of supporting the struggle for socialist revolution in the capitalist countries. In theory, workers' democracy in the DPRK would mean allowing all individuals and tendencies that accept the workers state and the dominance of the socialised economy to administer the society through democratically elected workers', collective farmers' and KPA soldiers' councils (ie *soviets*.) Of course, talking about "workers democracy" is far easier than implementing it in a small, imperilled workers state under constant threat of imperialist attack and which faces a hostile neighbour to the South in which two-thirds of the same nation as its own citizens live under capitalist rule in a state puffed up by imperialist support. **Even though pro-capitalist tendencies are by definition excluded in a workers democracy,** there is nevertheless a



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Effects of sanctions and constant imperialist pressure: in the rural areas of North Korea, bicycle is the main mode of transport.

danger that counterrevolutionary forces could exploit the greater openness to push their agenda or that inevitable differences of opinion within the pro-socialist camp could lead to dangerous disunity. It is not for nothing that the Russian Communist Party under Lenin's leadership decided to ban factions within the party in 1921. At that time, the young, isolated Soviet workers state was facing great peril with the country devastated by civil war and facing peasant rebellions.

In a workers state facing such imperialist pressure as the DPRK, it is inevitable that there will be differences of opinion between the supporters of socialism about what policy is needed. The ruling Workers Party of Korea, indeed, openly had many factions in its first few decades in power. Kim Il Sung and his faction gained the ascendancy because it had a greater following but it also used expulsions and repression against factional rivals within the Workers Party of Korea. Indeed, the building up of a cult of personality around Kim Il Sung was in good part aimed at ensuring his dominance over other factions in the communist movement. Yet, suppressing factional opponents – as opposed to challenging them in open political debate – only drives the opposition underground. Furthermore, it means that originally, pro-communist people who have different views to the current leaders can end up jumping off into the camp of counterrevolution out of anger at the bureaucratic treatment they have copped. Workers' democracy is the only mechanism that can allow the different, genuinely, pro-socialist viewpoints to not only be equitably debated but to be done so in a way that causes the least disruption to the workers state and which ensures that the maximum number of people holding differing pro-communist opinions remain mobilised to support the socialist order. It is worth noting that even after the Russian Communist Party banned factions in 1921, it continued to allow democratic debate and decision making within the party – until that party became decisively bureaucratized in the period following Lenin's death.

Furthermore, in the absence of workers democracy in a workers state the masses can become depoliticised. This then makes it

easy for even a small, determined clot of counterrevolutionaries, backed by imperialism, to gain the ascendancy. This is after all how the former USSR was destroyed. Furthermore, this danger grows the older that any workers state, not administered by workers' democracy, becomes. The first generation of masses living in a workers state understand vividly how much the creation of the workers state is a step forward because they have experienced the horrors of life under the previous capitalist order. The next generation are too young to have suffered life under capitalist rule and thus cannot have the same understanding etched through experience as their parents. Yet, they at least hear stories from their parents' generation about how much was achieved through anti-capitalist revolution. Yet as more generations pass, consciousness about how much was won by the revolution can become more distant and abstract. In particular, those in the DPRK who have not lived through either its formation and heroic fight for survival during the Korean War or its glory days of rapid development from the mid-1950s to the 1970s cannot necessarily have the same concrete sense of the benefits of the socialistic order as earlier generations.

Simultaneously, in the absence of an energetic involvement of the pro-communist masses in real decision making, there is a danger that the bureaucratic elite itself degenerates and loses commitment to socialism over time. To be sure, bureaucratic deformations within the DPRK workers state existed from the time of its foundation. This is because the overthrow of capitalism in the Northern part of Korea was not achieved mainly through an uprising of the urban working class with its capacity for self-organisation in a collective fashion. Rather it was achieved through, firstly, the bayonets of the Red Army of the USSR workers state that was itself already bureaucratically deformed and, secondly, through the struggle of peasant-based partisans who, while marvellously heroic, could, because of the disuniting effect of the individualistic nature of their labour, only be held together from above. However, the first generation of DPRK rulers, while enjoying some bureaucratic privileges, felt strongly committed to communism. After all, they made great sacrifices and waged heroic

struggles to first establish the DPRK and then defend it during the Korean War. However, subsequent generations of the bureaucratic layer have not been through such struggle. Thus, the corrupting effect of bureaucratic privileges can diminish their commitment to socialism to the point that some of them may seek to push for capitalist restoration if they see the masses looking the other way. In the ex-USSR, a component of the capitalist restorationist forces that gathered around Boris Yeltsin in 1991-92 included such counterrevolutionary ex-members of the workers state bureaucracy – including Yeltsin himself.

In all this, bureaucratic privilege plays a big role. On the one hand, it wets the anti-egalitarian appetites of sections of the bureaucracy, encouraging them to seek further privileges – privileges that can only be secured through capitalist restoration or initially through dangerous pro-market reforms. On the other hand, such privileges breed cynicism about the socialistic order amongst the workers' and farmers' mass as they travel along on foot or bicycle on a rural road while a flashy Mercedes, with a state official on board, whizzes by. That is why it is necessary to drastically curb such bureaucratic privileges in the DPRK. That, in turn, is a task which demands that there is a workers' democracy that enables the masses to scrutinise and participate in the administration of the state to the greatest extent possible.

DEFEND THE DPRK



Sydney, June 22: United front rally calls to defend socialistic North Korea.

Yet despite whatever number of problems and challenges the DPRK faces one thing is clear: socialists must stand for the unconditional defence of the DPRK workers state against capitalist military threats and attempts to undermine it. The overthrow of feudal/capitalist rule in the Northern part of the Korean Peninsula is a victory for the international working class. If the position of women is an indication of how progressive a society is then it becomes clear that the creation of a workers state in North Korea has been a significant step forward for social progress. When I was in North Korea, I observed that women are participating intensively in many aspects of social and economic life from being in leading positions in the public cultural facilities that I visited, to being school principals to being shop floor workers in factories. I also noticed that women make up a big proportion of both the police and the army in the DPRK. It was evident that the status of women in North Korea was not only much better than in capitalist developing countries but even ahead of many advanced capitalist countries. If women are still a way from reaching full equality in the DPRK – as evidenced by the predominance of men in its top political leadership – this is but an indication that the transition to socialism in North Korea is not complete nor could it be in a country ground down by sanctions and imperialist military provocations. Yet the fact that a country in the face of the most hostile imperialist pressure has advanced the status of women and achieved zero unemployment, an excellent education system, a culturally enriched population and a friendly society is a stunning accomplishment. It is an achievement that has been fought for and defended through great sacrifice: from the partisan war against Japanese imperialism to the Korean War against murderous U.S. and Australian imperialism to the period of hardship in the decade that followed the destruction of the USSR.

That is why it is absolutely criminal for any nominally Marxist group to point to problems in the DPRK – both real and imagined – as an excuse to avoid defending this workers state. Yet, this is what most of the major Left groups in Australia do. Thus the Socialist Alternative and Solidarity groups are openly hostile to the DPRK state. They justify this stance with the ridiculous claim

that the DPRK – and indeed Cuba, Vietnam and the PRC too – are simply “state capitalist.” Meanwhile, the Socialist Alliance avoid defence of the DPRK as a workers state, although a few of their individual activists take a much better position on the question. Of the bona fide Left groups in Australia, only Trotskyist Platform and the Communist Party of Australia (which has to its credit now become involved) actively campaign in defence of the DPRK. The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist League also, to different degrees, express solidarity with the DPRK in a less active way.

Of course, we should have no illusions that mobilising solidarity with the DPRK is an easy task, especially in the imperialist countries where anti-DPRK propaganda is most intense. In some “Third World” capitalist countries in Latin America, Africa and South Asia where anti-DPRK media coverage is less intense and where governments have reasonable diplomatic relations with the DPRK, there is actually considerable sympathy for the DPRK amongst the masses. But here in imperialist Australia, the media propaganda against North Korea is so overwhelming that many working class people have a jaundiced view of North Korea.

That is one of the reasons why it is impossible to build significant and lasting support for the DPRK simply by appealing to the sentiment that it is a small country standing up to powerful imperial powers. The only way that the media barrage against the DPRK can be overcome is by appealing to the class interests of workers through pointing out that the DPRK is a state where the workers in some way hold state power – a state that actually embodies a victory of the working class against capitalism. Through appealing to such class sentiment, it will also be possible to put in a proper context to Australian workers why the economic standard of living of workers in the DPRK is less than in imperialist Australia. As Trotskyist Platform put it in the call for a 12 February 2011 rally that it initiated, “Stop the Capitalists’ Provocations against Socialistic North Korea ” (a rally that was initiated in a period of intense war threats against the DPRK in the late 2010 – early 2011 period):

“... contrary to the hysterical Western media propaganda, the North Korean masses manage to get by and continue to hold steadfast against all the threats. They can be compared to workers on a long strike against a powerful boss – their struggle brings many hardships but they stand firm in the hope of a brighter future.

“Their courageous struggle to maintain socialistic rule must meet with solidarity from opponents of capitalism here. The conflict between the U.S-led capitalist states and the DPRK is a frontline in the conflict between socialism and capitalism, between the working class and the capitalist exploiters. Anyone here who cannot rise to the defence of the socialistic conquests in the DPRK – however warped they are from incessant capitalist pressure – is incapable of winning new conquests against capitalism.”

Ultimately, the only way to secure the anti-capitalist conquest in North Korea is by overthrowing capitalist rule in South Korea and in the imperialist countries that threaten the DPRK. To some degree this struggle depends on the policy of the DPRK leadership. When I visited the DPRK I noticed that socialist internationalism was not totally absent from the society. I noticed, for example, that the Arirang performance included acts praising the USSR’s role in the creation of the DPRK and the PRC’s role in protecting the DPRK during the Korean War and since. Yet the basic outlook of the DPRK leadership is not to encourage the overthrow of capitalist rule in the capitalist countries but to try and prod these capitalist states into seeking an accommodation with the DPRK. I got a sharp sense of this when returning back to Pyongyang from the border village, Panmunjom. As we were getting near Pyongyang we stopped at an impressive monument straddling the highway called the Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification. Erected in 2001, the monument expresses the wish for reunification and celebrates the plan for it outlined by founding DPRK leader Kim Il-Sung in which North and South Korea would be reunified as a confederation in which the North maintains its socialist system and the South its capitalist one. Although the wish



Karachi, Pakistan, May 2013: Pakistani trade unionists and leftists hold a determined rally in defence of the DPRK. Speakers and slogans at the rally not only hailed North Korea's struggle against imperialist aggression but pointed to its socialist foundations. Unlike in imperialist countries like Australia, where anti-communist media propaganda has at the moment bred popular suspicion of North Korea, North Korea's defiance of imperialist threats has won it much sympathy from the masses of the many ex-colonial countries (like Pakistan) still suffering under neocolonial domination. Politically aware sections of the masses in "Third World" capitalist countries like Pakistan are also aware that despite the DPRK being ground down by sanctions and imperialist encirclement, workers in socialistic North Korea enjoy more humane working conditions and better access to health care, education and housing than they do in their own countries. A pro-working-class, DPRK solidarity movement needs to be built in Australia by cutting through the anti-DPRK propaganda and by pointing to the pro-working class character of the DPRK state.

for reunification of the Korean people is indeed real, the program outlined by the DPRK leadership rejects the centrality of the need to overthrow capitalist rule in South Korea. In doing so it fails to utilise the authority that the DPRK has amongst part of the South

Korean masses – as the independent, true Korea – to serve the cause of socialist revolution in the South. Furthermore, the program is in any case unrealistic. The continuing intense hostility between North and South Korea is a product of the irreconcilable conflict between socialism and capitalism: an irreconcilable conflict that would make any confederation between the two Koreas based on both maintaining their existing systems inherently unstable.

Yet the main responsibility for the success or failure of the struggle for socialism in South Korea and the imperialist centres lies with the left-wing organisations there. If the Left is tailing after social-democratic (ALP-type) and liberal parties instead of boldly marking out the course towards socialist revolution then it is rather cheap for them to criticise the DPRK leadership for its failure to promote a revolutionary foreign policy.

What is equally cheap is the stance taken by some leftists that claim to be pro-DPRK while expressing hostility to the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). Some of these leftists are based in European countries. Their stance is especially cheap given that in Europe the capitalist rulers are not quite as focussed on enmity to the DPRK as the imperialist countries in the Pacific Rim – the U.S, Japan and Australia – while their hostility to the world's biggest workers state, the PRC, is as intense as that of the U.S. Such a stance also plainly does not make sense – since part of the reason for the imperialists' hostility to the DPRK is to try and undermine its socialistic ally and neighbour, the PRC.

During my stay in North Korea, I saw many signs of the socialist alliance between the DPRK and PRC. Shops sold badges bearing the DPRK and red, five-star PRC flags next to each other. Souvenir stalls stocked mementos to the alliance – such as stamp collections honouring the friendship between the two countries. Indeed, the final act, prior to the concluding scene, in the Arirang performance that I viewed was a lengthy one devoted specially to the friendship and solidarity between the DPRK and the PRC. After the U.S. imperialists and their allies directly entered the 1950-53 Korean War, the Korean Peoples Army was pushed all the way back to the

Chinese border. However, it was then that the Chinese peoples army entered the war and drove the imperialists and their South Korean puppets all the way back. It was this brave act of internationalism, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops, that saved the North Korean workers state from extinction. Earlier, North Korean partisans had fought alongside the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army in the latter's revolutionary struggle for liberation. Thus, the socialist alliance between the PRC and DPRK is an alliance sealed in blood and struggle.

However, it is at the same time an uneasy alliance. In recent decades the tension in the alliance has been due to the ruling Communist Party of China's program of seeking to build "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. In accordance with this capitulatory policy, the Chinese government joined the Western and Japanese imperialists in supporting UN resolutions condemning the DPRK for its recent successful satellite launch and nuclear test. To be sure, the PRC did insist on watering down these resolutions and in moderating the additional sanctions that were imposed. Nevertheless, the PRC leadership's failure to take an unequivocal stand in support of its socialistic neighbour is not only a betrayal of the DPRK but a betrayal of the struggle to maintain socialistic rule in China itself.

Yet, despite such betrayals the alliance between the PRC and DPRK remains. During the massive U.S.-South Korea military exercises titled "Fool Eagle" and "Key Resolve" that were launched on March 1 to threaten the DPRK, the Peoples Liberation Army itself staged exercises near the DPRK that were widely interpreted as being designed to send a warning to the U.S. and its allies and South Korea not to stage an attack on the DPRK. And during my stay in North Korea, I saw the economic cooperation between the DPRK and PRC and the assistance the latter has been giving. Thus, among the factories that I visited was the high-tech Taeon Friendship Glassworks which was jointly built by North Korean and Chinese workers and technicians in 2005 and whose factory equipment and a large part of its construction material were donated for free by the PRC. At the factory there were photos of the then PRC and DPRK leaders Hu Jintao and Kim Jong-Il together during an



A large crowd watches a dolphin show in Pyongyang aquarium.

Trotskyist Platform

October 2005 visit to the factory. The public relations guide to the factory spoke proudly of how the factory was an important symbol of friendship between the PRC and DPRK.

Despite all this, anti-PRC Western leftists that are nominally pro-DPRK continue to try and injure the socialist alliance between the DPRK and PRC. In doing so they are actually helping the imperialists that want to destroy both the DPRK and PRC. Ironically, they are also mirroring the agenda of the right-wing of the PRC establishment who have been increasingly vocal in their demands that China distance itself from the DPRK. These forces want a closer embrace of Western imperialism and understand that a rebuff of the DPRK would corrupt the socialistic foundations of the PRC itself and dovetail nicely with their agenda of greater "openness" for pro-capitalist forces and more "rights" for capitalist private enterprises in the economy. Opposing them are the left wing within the PRC who have been demanding that China stand squarely behind the DPRK as part of their struggle to

maintain the socialistic character of the PRC. Thus, the question of the DPRK is a key part of the battle for the future of China – a battle between socialism and capitalism whose outcome will have a massive impact on the entire world.

However, the outcome of this struggle will not be decided within China alone. The counterrevolutionary forces within China gain confidence from not only imperialist military pressure against the PRC but are greatly encouraged by the fact that almost the entire political scene within the imperialist centres is hostile to the PRC state. On the other hand, if genuine communists within the imperialist countries can mobilise actions in solidarity with the PRC workers state – actions that appeal to the class interests of the working class in standing by a workers state – then this will bolster the forces within the PRC itself that are seeking to strengthen the drive towards socialism. Similarly, solidarity actions in support of the DPRK within the imperialist centres will give confidence to the DPRK masses in their brave struggle to resist imperialist pressure.

On June 22, an important step forward was made in the campaign to build a united front movement in Australia in solidarity with the DPRK workers state. A united front rally was held on that day that called to “Stop Imperialist Provocations Against Socialistic North Korea!” Speakers in the June 22 action included long-time DPRK solidarity activists Raymond Ferguson and Peter Woods (who are also prominent members of the Australia-DPR Korea Association For Friendship And Cultural Relations) as well as representatives from Trotskyist Platform, the Communist Party of Australia and Supporters of the Iranian Peoples Fadaee Guerillas. Also powerfully addressing the rally was Brisbane communist activist Sam Bullock who happens to be a member also of Socialist Alliance but was acting in a purely individual capacity in supporting this action. The June 22 rally call appealed to the working class with the slogans: “Working Class People – We Must Protect Our Gains: Defend Our Trade Unions and Defend Our Workers State in North Korea!” As the call for the demonstration stated:

“Today the enmity of the imperialists (and the media that they own) to the defiantly socialistic DPRK is on a larger scale a version

of the hostility of the capitalist bosses to unions like the CFMEU construction union and especially the staunch, former Builders Labourers Federation trade union which was so viciously attacked for daring to defy the bosses’ state. Every proud worker knows that when the bosses attack another trade union, we should defend that union regardless of whether we agree 100% with every policy of the union’s leaders or not. So too must we defend the DPRK and stand by their people’s courageous struggle to maintain their hard won workers state.”

The brave people of North Korea whose sincere enthusiasm, friendliness and irrepressible love for life and music I witnessed would surely have appreciated that the Sydney speakout concluded with demonstrators to the jubilant melody of Offenbach’s *Infernal Galop* (made famous as the music for the French can-can dance) all chanting together:

“D – P – R – K Workers State is Here to Stay!”



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Children having fun learning to dance at the Chang Gwang Kindergarten in North Korea. North Koreans love their music and dance and the education system gives children every opportunity to enjoy these pursuits.

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