

The Socialist

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THE ENEMY IS AT HOME!



No to recession, No to war!

NEXT TIME you buy petrol—who can afford to fill up any more?—just be thankful for the many blessings of “free world” capitalism.

Until George Bush and Bob Hawke decided to invade the Gulf, petrol was selling at around 60 cents a litre. Today it's around 80 cents and rising.

The invasion was supposedly necessary to prevent a “maniac” like Saddam Hussein threatening to withhold oil supplies. Yet it's the West's blockade that has stopped the oil flowing.

All this century, the people of the Middle East have had their oil wealth plundered by a tiny cartel of multinational oil companies, the “Seven Sisters”.

Just look at them. The biggest, Shell and Exxon, are worth over \$70 billion each. Last year, Shell made \$8 billion profit and BP \$4 billion.

To guarantee their plunder, the British and Americans divided up the Gulf region, drawing “national” boundaries in the sand, and putting loyal clients like the brutal al-Sabah family in charge of the various emirates.

Saddam Hussein's “crime” was to upset that system of plunder and patronage. Bush's inva-

sion is aimed at protecting and restoring it.

In 1958, the British foreign secretary spelled it out: “At all costs these oilfields must be kept in Western hands... We need, if things go wrong, to ruthlessly intervene.” Or as the US magazine *Business Week* put it, “Oil is worth going to war for.”

But who for?

For every \$1 rise in the price of a barrel of oil, the oil companies add \$500 million to their profits. So far, the west's blockade has forced prices up \$20 a barrel, an extra \$200 million profits every week for the “Seven Sisters”.

The Australian ruling class too stands to make windfall gains. As an energy exporting country, coal, uranium and gas prices are also being pushed up to the benefit of BHP, WMC, Ampol, Woodside and Santos.

And the Federal government stands to collect another half a billion in extra petrol taxes.

There are no prizes for guessing who pays.

Yet the price rises have nothing to do with any shortage in supply. According to Bill Hermann, chief economist for Chevron Corp, “There's plenty of crude around.” Supplies are actually running slightly ahead of last year, due to increased production from Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.

The real reason for crazy oil prices is the market. Despite its critical importance to the world economy, the price of oil is in the hands of speculators, futures traders and other greedy parasites.

Oil prices around the world are set by the “spot market” at the New York Mercantile Exchange. The uncertainty caused by the West's invasion has created “fear” at the Merc. One American banker explained, “If you bet on the worst case and you're wrong, you may have missed some opportunities to make money—but you've survived to play another day.” But if the worst actually happens and you're unprepared “you get wiped out”.

Ordinary people are going to



pay in a second way.

With oil at \$40 a barrel, consumer prices in the US are expected to be 9% over last year, forcing the US economy to a standstill. And recession in the US will help drag the rest of the world down.

Australia is already in a recession, put there by conscious government policies to drive down our living standards.

The Liberals are demanding that rising petrol prices be excluded from any negotiations over wages. Keating is under

pressure from the ruling class to renegotiate the miserable Accord Mark VI signed before the election.

And around the country, factories, banks, TV stations and governments are sacking workers to “increase productivity”. While Hawke is spending tens of millions on the frigates he sent to the Gulf, Paul Keating tells us Australia cannot afford to fix up our decaying cities and transport systems.

There is no war, no massive array of troops to protect our jobs, our homes, our schools or the services we rely on.

If we are to defend them, we have only ourselves to rely on. We have to rebuild our unions into fighting organisations, and stand in solidarity with those who are facing the same enemy as ourselves.

That includes the Arab people who even today are rising against the West's new invasion.

What a miserable future capitalism offers us—not the glamorous glitz that is usually associated with the market, but unemployment, poverty, social decay and war.

The need to fight for a real socialist alternative could not be clearer.



RALLIES SAT 20 OCT

International Day
of Action against
US action in Gulf.

SYDNEY
10.30 am, US
Consulate, Cnr Park &
Castlereagh Sts, City.

MELBOURNE
10.30am, Brunswick
Town Hall, Sydney Rd.
March to Hawke's
office, Munro St,
Coburg & rally 12.00.

BRISBANE
11.00 am, Botanical
Gdns, March 11.30,
Rally & Speakout 12.00,
Roma St Forum.

Gulf coalitions organise

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY Gulf Action Committee was formed on 22 August, drawing in about 30 students and staff. We adopted the slogans "US Out of the Gulf" and "Bring Back the Frigates" in alliance with the GAC off-campus.

At Monash Uni, the Greens group is organising a debate on the Gulf crisis, between uni lecturers. ISO student members are helping to build these activities at both campuses because we want to see a broad movement in opposition to the US intervention.

Students, in particular, can play an important role in organising this opposition, just as they did during the anti-Vietnam campaign of the late 1960s.

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AS ELSEWHERE, only a minority of people are opposed to US and Australian involvement in the Gulf. They have nevertheless been able to conduct a steady campaign of actions attracting between 30 and 300.

Inside the coalition since its inception, there have been several political arguments, the key ones being over the potential role of the United Nations in resolving the conflict and the position which the group should adopt towards Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

The ISO has argued that the central issue in this conflict is Western imperialism in the Gulf. The West has had a long history of throwing its weight around in this region, creating non-existing countries, propping up dictators, intervening militarily, plundering the resources, and it's time they were kicked out. Opposing Iraq's invasion can play no constructive role in building that opposition to the West. In fact it can only strengthen the arguments of our enemies, that there is a justifiable reason for intervention. The West is the main enemy and we have to keep our sights fixed on them.

These arguments, and plenty more fruitful discussion will arise at the Coalition's next teach-in on 13 October.

Of course, if war should break out in the Gulf, then the Coalition will react accordingly; a rally will be held at 4.30 in King George Square on the day war breaks out.

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that they should be placed under the flag and supervision of the United Nations.

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This flies in the face of the whole history of the UN—from its formation as a tool to serve US foreign policy needs, right through its interventions in Korea, the Congo, and Namibia to Cambodia today. In every case it has acted to get the best result for the major imperialist powers, especially the US.

But there is another problem as well. No plan for a negotiated settlement exists in a vacuum. Negotiations can only be a utopian illusion unless they are based on a concrete assessment of the real situation.

In the Gulf crisis, this means looking not just at what the PLO would like to happen, but at the real balance of forces.

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Are there any positive examples of anti-racism? It's been encouraging to see concerned bodies in the non-Arab community, but the Arab community is still suspicious of the goals of the groups like those on the Left.

They've been used as a scapegoat for so long that they don't know who to trust or who to turn to.

They don't support Saddam Hussein himself, although they believe in what he's said about certain issues and dignity, but on the other hand they're against any blockade by foreign troops or the sending of the navy and don't believe any blockade of Iraq is going to solve the conflict when the whole thing is so hypocritical and one-sided.

The UN record and the record of the Australian Government over Timor, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and the Palestinian question and the veto in the UN by the five permanent members of the Security Council—none of these give hope.

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Where to now for Labor?

A WAVE OF REVULSION has swept the Labor Party after the Special National Conference tore up the party's platform on public ownership.

After years attacking Liberal proposals to privatise as "economic vandalism", Bob Hawke told the conference that it was necessary to keep the party relevant.

Relevant to whom? Certainly not to thousands of party members, who can no longer see how Labor is any different from the Liberals.

Certainly not to the workers in those industries. In a speech for its nervousness and trepidation, Greg Sword, head of the NUW (formerly the Storemen and Packers' Union), demanded that the purchasers of Australian and Qantas should have to have "appropriate industrial relations practices" as the price of his vote. But how can this possibly be guaranteed once they're sold?

How will privatisation help the millions of ordinary people who rely on Telecom and the airlines? Overseas it has meant timed local calls, a degeneration in maintenance, declining safety standards and cynical indifference from managers who are only after profits.

And the GIO in NSW has just abolished maternity leave for all new employees as part of its plan to become competitive with private insurance companies, in the lead-up to its privatisation.



HAWKE lecturing the special conference. It was a pyrrhic victory as he won the vote and lost the party.

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BUT the conference was hardly a triumph for Hawke. He may have won the vote but he's lost the party.

The decision to allow competition against Telecom on the basic phone network is bitterly opposed by the unions, especially the ATEA who are threatening to refuse to connect any competitor.

Over the last seven and a half years, Hawke has been able to defeat such challenges by isolating unions such as the BLF and the Pilots from the rest of the labour movement.

So far his attempts to isolate the ATEA have failed. The ACTU significantly refused to take a position on the privatisation debate and its officials played no role at the ALP conference.

The vote at the conference on Telecom—58 to 43—was much closer than Hawke wanted, with the entire South Australian centre-left voting with the left. Joan Kirner was the only left delegate to rat.

But close as it was, the vote in no way reflected opinion in the party. Every single state branch which has discussed it has rejected privatisation and competition for Telecom. Whether right or left, almost all branch discussions have ended the same way. The ATEA has not been isolated here.

BUT IF the conference was no great victory for Hawke, neither did the left build anything out of it.

There has been virtually no left activity outside the bureaucratic confines of the party—no rallies or public meetings, no open organising.

Part of the reason is that the left itself is deeply split over the issue. In the weeks leading up to the conference, Brian Howe, Nick Bolkus, and George Campbell all indicated they were either in favour of some privatisation, or at least prepared to be flexible.

The reason is simple. The leaders of the left are every bit as committed to the health of Australian capitalism as are the leaders of the right. The politi-

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By the time of the last election, they were losing patience with Hawke and Keating. They wanted profitability forced up through a more serious attack on our working conditions. They were concerned that Labor was losing its will to hammer us.

The buzz-word was "micro-economic reform".

Privatisation would not only bring windfall profits to those who got control of government businesses, but further undermine working conditions and the idea that governments ought to provide services to ordinary people.

That's why Hawke was told, in no uncertain terms by the media, that any failure to deliver privatisation would mean "the end of the government".

their right wing colleagues, they have to accommodate them.

But at the conference itself, the left argued on a very right wing basis.

On Telecom, the left agreed with Hawke and Beazley that Labor should aim for "Australian participation in the rapidly globalising telecommunications industry", via a merger with OTC, applauding Telecom's progress towards becoming a major multinational corporation.

This will mean that maintaining jobs will require continually finding new contracts overseas, and depend on Telecom's reliability and cheapness. So despite government ownership, Telecom workers will face exactly the same pressures as workers in private industry.

On Australian Airlines and Qantas, the left argued was that the decision should be a commercial one, and that selling them was a bad business decision because they were so profitable.

This may be true, but it's not the kind of comment that differentiates them from the Liberals.

Largely absent was any idea that privatisation should be opposed principally because of its effect on working conditions and trade union solidarity.

But then the left bureaucrats actively support productivity drives and attacks on working conditions in the public sector.

White politicians like Brian Howe and the metal workers' officials have accepted this shift, many workers and Labor Party members haven't. The result is paralysis inside the left.

AT THE conference itself, the "hard left" was able to discipline the "softs".

Indeed, Brian Howe, the leader of the left within Parliament, was removed from the left's delegation.

This in itself was significant. The dynamic of Labor in office has been that the "soft left" has been the vehicle for imposing all kinds of right wing reforms on the left as a whole.

The soft left's backdown was a pragmatic response to the sheer scale of the outrage in the party. Far more than

Another step towards decomposition

THE privatisation conference represents another step in the decomposition of the Labor government.

It seems almost grotesque now, but seven years ago, Hawke's popularity rating was over 70% and millions of people saw him as "The Messiah".

Running Australian capitalism forced Labor to undermine its own support, but it had no alternative. That is why a parliamentary strategy for change is so inherently bankrupt.

Privatisation was a no-win issue for Hawke. It merely bought his government a little time from the ruling class at the price of increased hostility from below.

Seven years ago, Labor could deliver higher profits without open class struggle. With the economy slipping into recession, with increasing discontent from both bosses and workers, that kind of option is fading fast.

The result of these growing pressures is that an historically disciplined government is starting to fracture. Keating is lashing out at the banks, both out of frustration and in a pathetic attempt to connect with Labor's disaffected.

There is no let up to the destabilising rumours about who will succeed Hawke. The official left will not willingly fight Hawke because in all

essentials they support him. government would be a struggle against them and their handiwork. After all, they wrote the Accord, they led the attack on the BLF, and it was Brian Howe who cut welfare. Laborism, in both its right and left wing guises, has nothing to offer ordinary working class people in a period of emerging crisis.

But that does not mean that there won't be a struggle for the future of the party—there will, and the momentum for such a struggle is growing. In Victoria, for instance, eight unions are opposing the preselection of anyone who voted the wrong way on privatisation. It is vitally important that socialists outside the Labor Party do not abstain from this, dismissing all wings of the party as equally reactionary.

Without giving an inch to any idea that Labor can be turned into a genuine socialist party, we need to identify with those who want Labor to represent working class interests.

By arguing for real action against the right, for demos and meetings to support the Telecom union, we can potentially drive a wedge between rank and file Labor socialists and their leaders and prove the futility of trying to change Labor.

International Socialist Organisation

Contact us!

MELBOURNE
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Phone (03) 629 3148
Write to: GPO Box 1473N, Melbourne, 3001.

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HOBART
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Hobart, 7501.

LATROBE VALLEY
Write to: GPO Box 1473N,
Melbourne, 3001.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

SOCIALISM
Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.
Although workers create society's wealth they have no control over production or distribution.
We stand for socialism, the creation of a society in which the workers will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.
Countries like Russia, China and Cuba are not socialist. Workers under these state capitalist regimes also face the task of building their own revolutionary movement to smash the system and take control into their own hands.

WORKERS' POWER
Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.
Liberation can only be won

through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power—a new kind of state based on democratically-elected workers' councils.

REVOLUTION, NOT REFORMISM
Socialism cannot be created by gradual reforms as some in the Labor Party believe. The capitalist state—parliament, the military, the law—is a weapon of class rule and must be smashed. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

INTERNATIONALISM
The working class exists in all countries and the struggle for socialism knows no national boundaries. We are for building an international movement organising to overcome national divisions between workers.

Socialism cannot be built in a single country; socialist

revolutions must be spread if they are to survive.
We oppose imperialism, East and West, and support all national liberation struggles against imperialist domination.
Australia is not an oppressed country, but an imperialist power in its own right. This means we are opposed to Australian nationalism and immigration controls.
The threat of nuclear annihilation is a product of capitalism and only socialism can end it.

LIBERATION FROM OPPRESSION
We fight for democratic rights and liberation. We are against the oppression of women, blacks, migrants and lesbians and gay men. All these forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. Combatting them is an essential part of building a united revolutionary struggle, that can create a socialist society free from oppression.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION
Crucial to a workers' movement smashing the capitalist state is a revolutionary workers' party built out of the day to day struggles around economic and political issues. We are taking the first steps towards building such a party.
Our task today is to argue for the ideas and traditions of revolutionary socialism, while fighting alongside militants and activists who are challenging the system.
It is out of these ideas and struggles that a mass revolutionary movement and party will eventually be built.
If that's what you want to do, JOIN US!



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also been willing to talk about negotiations. His terms are "complete and unconditional" Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, the restoration of the "legitimate" government of Kuwait, protection of US citizens there, and stability in the region.

It is this last condition which is most important. There is a strong feeling among a number of Gulf Arab leaders, and important sections of the US ruling class, that the only way stability can be guaranteed is by crushing Saddam Hussein in one climactic military confrontation.

No better evidence of this approach could be found than the statement that got the US Air Force Chief of Staff, General

Michael Dugan, sacked. He talked openly of the need for an air strike to shatter Iraqi resistance—not by mucking around in the countryside, but by bombing Baghdad, specifically targeting Saddam Hussein.

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What do you think of Hawke and multiculturalism?

He doesn't like Muslims. He doesn't understand Muslims. I don't trust him but on the other hand I don't trust the Liberal stance or record.

Are there any positive examples of anti-racism?

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The vote at the conference on Telecom—58 to 43—was much closer than Hawke wanted, with the entire South Australian centre-left voting with the left. Joan Kimer was the only left delegate to rat.

But close as it was, the vote in no way reflected opinion in the party. Every single state branch which has discussed it has rejected privatisation and competition for Telecom. Whether right or left, almost all branch discussions have ended the same way. The ATEA has not been isolated here.

BUT IF the conference was no great victory for Hawke, neither did the left build anything out of it.

There has been virtually no left activity outside the bureaucratic confines of the party—no rallies or public meetings, no open organising.

Part of the reason is that the left itself is deeply split over the issue. In the weeks leading up to the conference, Brian Howe, Nick Bolkus, and George Campbell all indicated they were either in favour of some privatisation, or at least prepared to be flexible.

The reason is simple. The leaders of the left are every bit as committed to the health of Australian capitalism as are the leaders of the right. The politi-

cians would not be allowed into the ministry if they weren't. That affects their view of government enterprises.

Amongst generations of trade union activists, state control over industry was seen as a way of undermining the brutality of capitalist competition and challenging profit as the organising principle of society. In that sense it represented a striving towards some kind of socialism.

But for the politicians and union bureaucrats, state intervention was part of an economic strategy for making Australian capitalism stronger.

Indeed, in the years after the war, western capitalism generally turned towards large-scale state ownership and control of industry.

This illustrated something long pointed out by Marx, Lenin and Bukharin—that without a control over the state, there was nothing at all "socialist" about state ownership.

With the crisis of the 1970s came the realisation that state-owned and protected industries were dragging down national competitiveness. In response we've seen waves of restructuring, cuts, privatisation and cuts to tariffs—by Thatcher, Reagan, Gorbachev, Mazowiecki in Poland, and Hawke and Keating here.

Whilst politicians like Brian Howe and the metal workers' officials have accepted this shift, many workers and Labor Party members haven't. The result is paralysis inside the left.

AT THE conference itself, the "hard left" was able to discipline the "softs".

Indeed, Brian Howe, the leader of the left within Parliament, was removed from the left's delegation.

This in itself was significant. The dynamic of Labor in office has been that the "soft left" has been the vehicle for imposing all kinds of right wing foibles on the left as a whole.

their right wing colleagues, they have to accommodate working class interests.

But at the conference itself, the left argued on a very right wing basis.

On Telecom, the left agreed with Hawke and Beazley that Labor should aim for "Australian participation in the rapidly globalising telecommunications industry", via a merger with OTC, applauding Telecom's progress towards becoming a major multinational corporation.

This will mean that maintaining jobs will require continually finding new contracts overseas, and depend on Telecom's reliability and cheapness. So despite government ownership, Telecom workers will face exactly the same pressures as workers in private industry.

On Australian Airlines and Qantas, the left argued that the decision should be a commercial one, and that selling them was a bad business decision because they were so profitable.

This may be true, but it's not the kind of comment that differentiates them from the Liberals.

Largely absent was any idea that privatisation should be opposed principally because of its effect on working conditions and trade union solidarity.

But then the left bureaucrats actively support productivity drives and attacks on working conditions in the public sector.

The official left will not willingly fight Hawke because in all

Another step towards decomposition

THE privatisation conference represents another step in the decomposition of the Labor government.

It seems almost grotesque now, but seven years ago, Hawke's popularity rating was over 70% and millions of people saw him as "The Messiah".

Running Australian capitalism forced Labor to undermine its own support, but it had no alternative. That is why a parliamentary strategy for change is so inherently bankrupt.

Privatisation was a no-win issue for Hawke. It merely bought his government a little time from the ruling class at the price of increased hostility from below.

Seven years ago, Labor could deliver higher profits without open class struggle. With the economy slipping into recession, with increasing discontent from both bosses and workers, that kind of option is fading fast.

The result of these growing pressures is that a historically disciplined government is starting to fracture. Keating is lashing out at the banks, both out of frustration and in a pathetic attempt to connect with Labor's discontented.

There is no let up to the destabilising rumours about who will succeed Hawke.

The official left will not willingly fight Hawke because in all

essentials they support him: a struggle against the government would be a struggle against them and their handwork.

After all, they wrote the Accord, they led the attack on the BLF, and it was Brian Howe who cut welfare. Laborism, in both its right and left wing guises, has nothing to offer ordinary working class people in a period of emerging crisis.

But that does not mean that there won't be a struggle for the future of the party—there will, and the momentum for such a struggle is growing. In Victoria, for instance, eight unions are opposing the preselection of anyone who voted the wrong way on privatisation.

It is vitally important that socialists outside the Labor Party do not abstain from this, dismissing all wings of the party as equally reactionary.

Without giving an inch to any idea that Labor can be turned into a genuine socialist party, we need to identify with those who want Labor to represent working class interests.

By arguing for real action against the right, for demos and meetings to support the Telecom union, we can potentially drive a wedge between rank and file Labor socialists and their leaders and prove the futility of trying to change Labor.

You are invited to the annual CONFERENCE

of the International Socialist Organisation

WHEN? New Year weekend: Sat 29 – Mon 31 December

There will also be a rally on the night of Friday 28th

...and a New Year's Eve party on the Monday night to finish conference with a bang!

WHERE? Melbourne's YWCA

For further details, ring your local ISO branch (see page 2) or write to GPO Box 1473N, Melbourne, 3001.

There will be a small charge to cover costs. Lunches will be supplied and child-care available if requested in advance

International Socialist Organisation

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

SOCIALISM

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth they have no control over production or distribution.

We stand for socialism, the creation of a society in which the workers will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment. Countries like Russia, China and Cuba are not socialist.

Workers under these state capitalist regimes also take the task of building their own revolutionary movement to smash the system and take control into their own hands.

WORKERS' POWER

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can only be won

through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power—a new kind of state based on democratically-elected workers' councils.

REVOLUTION, NOT REFORMISM

Socialism cannot be created by gradual reforms as some in the Labor Party believe. The capitalist state—parliament, the military, the law—is a weapon of class rule and must be smashed. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

INTERNATIONALISM

The working class exists in all countries and the struggle for socialism knows no national boundaries. We are for building an international movement organising to overcome national divisions between workers.

Socialism cannot be built in a single country; socialist

revolutions must be spread if they are to survive.

We oppose imperialism, East and West, and support all national liberation struggles against imperialist domination. Australia is not an oppressed country, but an imperialist power in its own right. This means we are opposed to Australian nationalism and immigration controls.

The threat of nuclear annihilation is a product of capitalism and only socialism can end it.

LIBERATION FROM OPPRESSION

We fight for democratic rights and liberation. We are against the oppression of women, blacks, migrants and lesbians and gay men. All these forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. Combatting them is an essential part of building a united revolutionary struggle, that can create a socialist society free from oppression.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

Crucial to a workers' movement smashing the capitalist state is a revolutionary workers' party built out of the day to day struggles around economic and political issues. We are taking the first steps towards building such a party.

OUR TASK TODAY IS TO ARGUE FOR THE IDEAS AND TRADITIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM, WHILE FIGHTING ALONGSIDE MILITANTS AND ACTIVISTS WHO ARE CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM.

It is out of these ideas and struggles that a mass revolutionary movement and party will eventually be built.

If that's what you want to do, JOIN US!



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German reunification—whose victory?

AN OCCASION of "joy, gratitude and hope" was how Helmut Kohl described the reunification of East and West Germany.

In contrast, many on the left see it as a tragedy, a defeat for socialism and a victory for Kohl and the right-wing forces he represents. They point to the way many workers openly espouse the ideology of the market, the rise in German nationalism and some even raise the spectre of a Fourth Reich.

While socialists can't rejoice over the fact that many East German workers do have massive illusions in the market and life as part of the West, the situation is one where quite contradictory dynamics are at work.

Despite Kohl's rhetoric, reunification does present dangers for the German ruling class—the biggest threat being a large and combative working class that will not sit idly by while their wages and conditions are attacked. East German workers especially have already waged a successful struggle to topple a government that had oppressed and exploited them for years.

East Germany was never socialist, but a system of state-controlled capitalism. The top bureaucrats who controlled industry made their decisions on exactly the same basis as their counterparts in the West—the drive to accumulate capital at the expense of the working class. While lacking a great deal of internal competition, East Germany was competing, primarily militarily, with the West.

Yet while the end of Stalinism is a step forward, the movement could have gone much further than it did. Replacing East Germany's state capitalism with "private" capitalism has succeeded in changing the form of oppressive rule, but not its content.

Though the Communist Party lost formal power in the March elections, the old rulers are still in place. East German managers made links with West German firms, distanced themselves from the now discredited Communist Party and moved over to the opposition parties, all the time maintaining their control of industry. That was how some of the country's leading "Communists" came to celebrate the destruction of the Berlin Wall and to support reunification with West Germany.

OPPORTUNISM and manoeuvring to plug up one crisis after another has been the hallmark of both ruling classes in the run-up to reunification.

The Christian Democrat leader of East Germany, Maiziere, concentrated his efforts on a futile attempt to get all-German elections held before full unification, since most of the East German parties were threatened by the West German rule which says a party must have 5% of the vote to sit in parliament. This problem has now been solved with the proposition that these parties can be allowed to "piggy-back" bigger West German ones and get in that way.

In West Germany, Kohl and Lafontaine, the leader of the Social Democrats, have spent much of their time squabbling over the timing of elections as well. Kohl wanted to push through elections and reunification as fast as he could, to avoid the popular backlash from the crisis.

Lafontaine, on the other hand, wanted unification to come in slowly so that Kohl would take the blame for the crisis and the Social Democrats would get his votes. In no way has the SPD posed any kind of alternative to the conservatives. In response to the likelihood of West German women going to East Ger-



LEFT: Hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrate for reunification in Leipzig in February. The left has misunderstood their struggle.

Kohl faces a victory hangover

many to take advantage of its more liberal abortion laws, Lafontaine called for the tightening of laws to stop them.

It will not take too long before many in East Germany start to see through the "everyone can have a higher living standard in a market economy" promises Kohl has been making.

Though years of state capitalism were a disaster for East German workers, the credit for the unusual success of the West German economy is not simply due to the market. At the time of partition in 1945 the bulk of major industry was concentrated in the West and unlike East Germany it received enormous injections of capital from Western investors.

The West German economy, like Japan's, benefited from the ban on full rearmament imposed by the Allies at the end of World War II. Unlike the US, most of the surplus was ploughed back into productive sectors of the economy.

Even in West Germany itself, who really benefits from high economic growth? Rents, thanks to a severe housing shortage, are phenomenal. Many estate agents charge up to 5 months rent (illegally) just to find houses for people. And the environmental crisis is appalling.

YET WE SHOULDN'T be surprised at all that workers in the East are rejecting what they have been told by their rulers is "communism", a system supposedly fundamentally different to the West.

Workers maintained their illusions in the market because the "socialist" alternative seemed to be one

of shortages, poor quality goods and the Stasi.

Even the most radical sections of the opposition in East Germany see some kind of mixed economy as the answer. The acceptance of the idea that the two Germanies represented two fundamentally different systems, however, can lead people to respond to the negative effects of reunification by defending aspects of the old Stalinist regime.

The most radical opposition group, the United Left, actually showed an interest in an electoral alliance with the PDS, the party of the old rulers, to fight local elections in May. Later they participated in round table discussions where, having acceded to popular pressure to disband the security police, ex-leaders of the regime got support for establishing new political police units under the guise of countering fascists.

The Stalinist bureaucracy is no alternative for workers reacting against the effects of privatisation. Some supporters of the old regime who still hold influential jobs in East German ministries recently tried to get Stasi files destroyed.

Far from opposing the encroachments of the market, they support the restructuring of the economy in collaboration with West German capital and at workers' expense. Not long ago, the PDS voted with conservatives to include a ban on strikes in any new constitution and voted down a proposal that workers be allowed to elect factory managers and supervisors.

The support of East German bosses for reunification cannot be seen as some kind of sell-out. Their concern today remains the same as it did when the state controlled the economy—to maintain their own positions and make workers pay for restructuring in the face of economic

crisis. Opposition elements who respond to the current situation by offering credibility to these people, will simply be cutting their own throats.

The ordinary people who were the driving force for reform in East Germany hoped reunification would change their lives for the better. For the workers, the demand for reunification was both an economic demand, and a demand for political democracy. In the East German elections, they therefore voted for the party that promised reunification soonest—the Christian Democrats.

The role of socialists had to be to connect with these sentiments, to identify fully with their utter hatred of the old system, to see their profoundly revolutionary dynamic, at the same time as very patiently arguing against illusions in either the market or Kohl.

SOcialists who took this stance are now able to connect with the increasing disillusionment with the market.

"We didn't think things would get so bad—we had no idea," was the comment from a worker from the East German town of Neuruppin last month. Not long ago his factory was a showpiece for the old "Communist" regime. Today West German consultants say the workforce must be cut from 3000 to 850 to make it profitable.

On 1 July there was officially no unemployment in East Germany. By September it was 300,000 and rising at 30,000 a week. But the real figures are even higher. The state is paying for massive "short time working", with workers sitting at home being paid 65% of their wages until they can become officially unemployed. So the real figures are more like 1 million out of a workforce of 8.4 million, and rising.

Industrial output slumped by nearly 10% in the first 6 months of this

year, is on the point of collapse. The reason is that Western capital, despite its promises, is not investing in East Germany. Even big companies are reluctant to take the risk.

But when it came to selling to East Germans, they weren't so shy. Since monetary union on 1 July there has been a massive surge of imports. The result is that prices of everything are going up and East German producers, deprived of state subsidies, are going broke.

As West German produce floods the market, food has to be destroyed or recycled as animal feed. Farmers in the huge farm co-ops in particular have accused the governments of both Germanies of deliberately trying to bankrupt them.

East German wages, which have at least risen from their former level of 60% of West German wages, cannot keep up with inflation and tax increases. This is despite increases of 30 and 40% being won by some workers.

THE DESIRE for a better life today continues to drive workers in both halves of Germany into confrontation with their rulers.

West German women workers are out on the streets demanding that with reunification they have the right to the same liberal abortion laws that now exist in East Germany. West German unionists at General Motors have demanded that General Motors workers in East Germany be paid the same as them.

In March 6500 workers at East Berlin's biggest state owned building corporation threatened strike action in the face of a merger with a big Western contractor and forced the director of the company to withdraw the plan. In the middle of this year metal workers struck—mostly organised by West German unions—and won a 30% pay rise, a one year job guarantee and reduced their working hours from 43 to 40 hours a week.

Around the same time East German farmers blockaded parliament and a demonstration of 250,000 a few weeks later saw the Agricultural Minister pelted with eggs, tomatoes and punches. In September there were strikes by emergency workers and transport workers for wage rises and job guarantees. At the end of that month demonstrations were reported to be growing by the week.

This is the kind of opposition that Kohl and his East German counterparts are terrified of, the kind of opposition that can grow as the reality of their new life exposes Kohl's empty promises. And it's precisely these sorts of struggles that can pose a real alternative to the horrors of capitalism, East and West.

The potential for explosive struggles has increased with reunification. The estimated cost facing Kohl's government is between \$30 and \$50 billion. The political costs will be high too as the government will try to make the workers pay through lower living standards.

This was the origin of the 500-Day plan now associated with Shatalin and Yeltsin.

But for all the argument, acrimony and division, the differences between Ryzhkov and Shatalin are not about whether to introduce price increases, privatisation etc, but how rapidly this should take place.

All of them now accept there will be massive job losses although they may argue over the exact figures.

Shatalin's 500-Day plan is really a variant of the shock therapy inflicted on Poland that has seen a 40% decline in the standard of living, massive increases in unemployment, but no sign of the investment or injection of funds that was meant to follow the shock.

Even with government incentives the obsolete, dilapidated enterprises of Polish industry are not the most attractive to the privateer with an eye to profit. The same thing goes for Russia, only double.

—by Barbie Russell

SHATALIN'S 500-DAY PLAN FOR THE USSR:

IN THE LAST couple of months the USSR has sunk further into social and economic chaos.

Prime Minister Ryzhkov warned of the "danger of disintegration of the USSR" and made an impassioned plea for the Supreme Soviet to reject the 500-Day Shatalin plan for the economy, as he fought against calls for his own resignation.

The economy has degenerated to the point where, in the middle of a record grain harvest, bread, which was once considered to be a staple food, is now in short supply. There have been riots and strikes over the shortages of tobacco and cigarettes.

In many cities and regions shopping for anything is only possible with a passport proving your residential status. Regions have banned the export of goods of all kinds in retaliation—a measure which in itself only serves to magnify the problem.

Rationing of such things as meat, butter, soap and bread is widespread. No less than seven cities have declared their intention to become "free economic zones".

All 15 republics have now made some declaration of sovereignty or independence. Estonia has refused to be part of the negotiations for a new treaty of federation of the USSR. Some cities, for example Lvov in the Ukraine, and some regions and even whole republics like Georgia, have refused to be part of the military call up or have moved to form their own army service.

In Moscow, in mid-September, 100,000 people marched to the walls of the Kremlin demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Ryzhkov and his government. Soldiers are being mobilized in a desperate effort to get potatoes and other crops harvested.

This is the background to the two weeks of frenzied debate in the Supreme Soviet that set yet another "deadline", 15 October, for Mikhail Gorbachev to present a programme for the introduction of "market reforms".

This compromise came after deputies were unable to decide between the rival Ryzhkov and Shatalin plans for the transition to a market economy.

The ruling class clings desperately to its control

DEMANDS for Ryzhkov's resignation have been around since his last attempt to introduce market reforms, when it was announced that prices of meat, fish and bread would rise by 200-300%.

In Leningrad a month's food supply was stripped from shops in three days of panic buying. It was the beginning of what has been called "bureaucratic feudalism" as cities and regions collapsed into crude protectionist barter of goods with fierce competition over scarce resources.

One of the demands of the miners' strike in July, precipitated by the proposed price increases, was for Ryzhkov's resignation. At the time, Yeltsin made himself popular by suggesting that the market could be introduced without price increases.

This was the origin of the 500-Day plan now associated with Shatalin and Yeltsin.

But for all the argument, acrimony and division, the differences between Ryzhkov and Shatalin are not about whether to introduce price increases, privatisation etc, but how rapidly this should take place.

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No answer to the chaos



A SPONTANEOUS street blockade in Moscow protests against the shortage of cigarettes.

SHATALIN'S plan is popular because it seems to avoid immediate price increases and it claims to move maximum control away from the centre.

On this basis a number of republics, including the dominant Russian republic, have declared in favour of it.

But the fact is that the largest enterprises in the USSR are "all union factories"—operating across Republican boundaries—the USSR equivalent of multinationals.

The next largest are mixed enterprises controlled jointly by the central ministries and the republican ones. Neither the government of Russia, nor the those of the various republics, can privatise them unilaterally.

Gorbachev's first decree under his emergency powers recognises this fact and ironically, considering his mandate is "to lead the economy to market principles", the decree is concerned to establish or re-establish greater control from the centre.

Such are the contradictions. For the workers of the USSR the market has become a symbol of their hopes for an abundance of consumer goods and an improvement in their standard of living.

So when the miners went on strike in July, they were simultaneously opposed to Ryzhkov and the proposed price increases, and for the introduction of a "real market economy".

Regardless of what compromise Gorbachev cobbles together, price increases, shortages and unemployment can only get worse. The miners are only one section of workers who have so far refused to pay the price of the introduction of market reforms.

Further struggles are inevitable as workers confront the reality of the market and a ruling class determined to make them pay for the crisis.

For the moment workers may have illusions in Yeltsin and the 500-Day plan, but out of those future struggles a genuine socialist consciousness can emerge, one based on the power of the working class to restructure the economy of the USSR from below.



ILLUSIONS in the 500-day plan won't last long.

By Ian Rintoul

There is a fusing of the state executive apparatus and the economic monopolies. The heads of the giant firms that dominate Soviet industry can raise their prices at will because of their monopoly position and also refuse to produce "unprofitable" goods regardless of needs of the economy or society.

Managers of collective and state farms have been engaged in similar action to protect their own interests. They are using their control over the much needed and politically sensitive supply of food to demand favourable economic consideration.

Yet all the schemes for "reform" are based on the economy remaining in these, the same hands as before with the present bureaucratic owners transforming themselves into individual entrepreneurs or share holders in joint stock companies.

Meanwhile the workers of Russia and the republics are to pay the price with their jobs and stan-

dard of living. Looked at in this way, it becomes clear that the introduction of capitalism into the USSR but the machinations of a ruling class desperate to restructure their state capitalist system out of a crisis beyond their wildest nightmares. It is however far from obvious that any such scheme can save the Russian economy.

Ryzhkov's plan with its administratively controlled price increases is politically unacceptable. Shatalin on the other hand relies on selling off state-owned cars and lorries, unfinished construction sites, state flats and shops etc. But who has got the money to buy a laundry or a hair-dressing salon in the first place?

Similarly, the proposal of selling shares to privatise state-owned industry is reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's popular capitalism. But the people with the money are either the *nomenklatura* or the mafia.

IN BRIEF

Crocodile tears

THE HEADS of state of 73 nations gathered in New York to talk about child poverty and starvation at the beginning of this month. The meeting was organised by the United Nations.

Accommodation was in luxury hotels. Meals consisted of, amongst other things, fillet of sole meuniere with a crayfish garnish and a side of asparagus tips, Chateau Couffret wines and vanilla ice cream with chestnuts and chestnut sauce. \$7.5 million was spent on security to prevent the poor of New York getting in on the act.

What was the result of this noble gathering? No money was promised to end the hunger and disease. The United States refused to support the "Convention on the rights of the child" because it does not explicitly oppose abortion.

Margaret Thatcher's contribution was to call on parents to give more time and affection to their children. Very useful advice for a family in which everyone is malnourished.

Bob Hawke did not attend—presumably because since the New Year, there have not been any Australian children living in poverty.

Canadian democracy

THE Conservative prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, didn't have the numbers to force a new sales tax through the Canadian parliament.

The Canadian senate operates on appointment, not election, so he asked Queen Elizabeth II to add eight new members to the senate. The wall has come down in Berlin. Someone should tell the

"Thus," says the report in Mos-

supporters of the Westminster system of government.

Greece

GREECE has been hit by a massive strike wave. All major areas of the economy have been rocked.

One of the most militant sectors has been white collar bank workers. Banks were closed for at least two weeks in September due to strikes.

Athens has been hit by ten hour electricity cuts on a daily basis. Telephone, public transport and local government workers have all been out. In fact there were general strikes on two occasions last month.

The strikes are in response to a government austerity package. The latest elements of the package have been mass sackings in the nationalised industries and savage attacks on pensions and social security.

At the time of going to press it was unclear whether the union leaders were going to attempt to end the campaign.

Bougainville

THE PNG government has stepped up its occupation of Buka Island, separated from the main Bougainville island by 500 metres of sea.

Many rebels have been killed in recent clashes with the government forces. The government is hoping to use Buka Island as a springboard for defeating the Bougainville Revolutionary Army.

While the army is killing rebels it is also trying to hold talks with their representatives in Port Moresby. Not surprisingly the rebels have said they don't feel inclined to go to the PNG capital.

VOTE 'LEFT' IN PSU ELECTIONS

THE PUBLIC Sector Union (PSU) is holding elections around Australia in November.

In both Sydney and Melbourne the dominant left ALP officials are being challenged by more left wing tickets—Rank and File Alternative (RFA) in

NSW, and the PSU Action Group (PAG) in Victoria.

After the defeats and passivity of the last couple of years socialists would welcome the current bureaucrats being turfed out. A victory for the left would increase the possibility of a fightback after years of government attacks.

In 1988 Social Security workers in Sydney went on strike for six weeks and saved 700 jobs. This strike was possible, in part, because Trevor Deeming of RFA was pressured by his own supporters to call a mass meeting over the staffing cuts.

What has been the record of the incumbents? Social Security is renowned for its yearly staffing campaigns. The current claim began in February! Negotiations haven't occurred for months.

Most rank and file members aren't interested because years of experience tell them that a *fait accompli* will be served up that will result in further job losses. This one will probably be announced as ballot papers arrive for the election and be dressed up as some kind of victory.

RFA and PAG both draw support from members who are unhappy with the continual government attacks and are disgruntled with a union leadership that does nothing about them.

The clearest example of this is that the two traditionally most

militant sections of the public service, Social Security in Sydney and Veterans Affairs in Melbourne, will vote heavily for the opposition tickets. Those sections want to see Wendy Caird and Doug Lilly thrown out.

However, while socialists should actively campaign for the election of RFA and PAG we should also be honest about their limitations.

FAIL

Both groups are first and foremost electoralist. While they attack the dominant officials for their failure to defend real wages and job levels, they fail to point any way forward.

The activists in both groups quite openly agree that the Prices and Incomes Accord has been a disaster for public servants and workers in general.

Yet they are not prepared to fight for wages outside the Accord. They consider that the union membership is too conservative and the fight too hard, so

they capitulate to the members' pessimism.

The consequences were clearly seen in mass meetings over wages in September. While the sell-out grubs who run the union presented the membership with the *fait accompli* of Accord Mark VI, RFA and PAG opposed them and moved an alternative motion.

The problem was that the alternative was itself within the wage-cutting Accord. In the Sydney mass meeting this was argued explicitly by RFA.

The years of the Hawke government have been tough ones for public servants. A future Liberal Party government is likely to be even tougher. The attacks on wages and conditions will only be ended when a union is prepared to stand up and lead a fight.

While RFA and PAG are not themselves the answer, their election would be a definite step in the right direction.

—by Ian McBain (Social Security, Sydney) and Patrick McLeish (Veterans Affairs, Melbourne)

Left gains at unis

STUDENT union elections at Melbourne Uni ended with a real scare for right-wing Labor officials.

In their best result for years, the left looks like doubling its seats on student council and taking many of the committee positions.

This shift is a welcome relief from right-wing Labor's domination. But the real test of the left is whether it can build campaigns and regular open left-wing organisation and debate outside the committee rooms.

And at the UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, progressive forces achieved a major victory when the Equalizers Team, consisting of Overseas and Palestinian students, won all the major positions on the Student Union Executive.

The week after the election, the Equalizers held a meeting to discuss policy, inviting all left groups to attend. At this meeting the ISO argued against any illusions in the bureaucratic road to student participation, and that the Union should take clear positions on such issues as the Melbourn effort in the Gulf, and on sexual harassment and women's issues.

The Equalizers have set up a weekly meeting to discuss these and other suggestions.

COPS, JAIL FAIL TO BREAK LEIGHTON'S PICKET

THE EVERYDAY BRUTALITY of the capitalist system is being highlighted at a picket line in Melbourne.

By Patrick McLeish

On 8 June, 1990, 76 carpenters and labourers employed by Leighton's construction company at 417 St Kilda Rd, were sacked and told their only hope for a job was to sign up on Monday with a sub-contracting company, K-Crete, on much worse conditions.

Many of the workers had been with Leighton's for years, and one who was summarily fired had been there over 30 years.

In their battle to defend their basic rights, they have faced violent attacks by police with batons and horses, threats of expulsion from their union, the BWIU, and one of them, Ralph Edwards, has already spent 15 days in jail—all for fighting to defend jobs.

However the bosses and their allies have not got it all their own way. Picketers have been increasing the pressure on Leighton's over recent weeks. Ralph Edwards told a meeting of the Melbourne branch of the ISO last month.

attempt to get back into the industry. Conveniently timed in the run up to the BLF's re-registration hearing next April, the workers at 417 have been pawns in the government's power play.

Without the Olympics the Melbourne building industry is headed for a hard landing. In the last two weeks of September almost 400 building workers were sacked in Melbourne.

PROSPECT

The fight at 417 is continuing despite the betrayals of union officials and the legal attacks by Leighton's. As Leighton's losses climb toward \$4.5 million and with little prospect of any compensation from the almost bankrupt State Labor government, the possibility that Leighton's will seek a settlement is increasing.

The resolve shown by the workers at 417 is something more and more building workers will need in the coming months as the downturn in the industry becomes more savage.

And the assault on their right to work and their right to picket will become more common.

That's why solidarity and support is so necessary now.



LEIGHTON'S workers face police horses and batons as they picket to get their jobs back.

PS militants refuse to be silenced

WITH the Leighton's workers fighting for their jobs, some unionists working for the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs, which is also in St Kilda Rd, decided to build support for the picket.

They called a meeting of PSU members to discuss the issues arising from the dispute, management banned the meeting from taking place at the workplace. The PSU members defied management's attempt to deny them their right to free speech and went ahead.

But when members of the PSU's Tax

Delegates' Committee decided to invite one of the picketers to address a delegates meeting and put their side of the story, the union's Joint Victorian Secretary, Doug Lilly, and Tax Office Secretary, Paul Tregillis, intervened to try and stop them, telling them that they "know without question" that PSU members in Tax would not want to get "involved" in the Leighton's dispute.

Left wing and militant members have issued a leaflet challenging this attempt to stifle discussion within the union.

Barbarism in the jails

SEPTEMBER saw a series of strikes and riots across the prisons of NSW.

The prisoners were reacting to the decision by Corrective Services Minister, Michael Yabsley, to savagely cut the amount of personal property that inmates are allowed.

On any one day there have been up to 900 prisoners locked in their cells after protesting. Damage in just six jails is put at up to \$8 million, half at Parklea jail alone.

Yabsley has banned crucifixes, rosary beads, thongs, posters, ear studs and *budgerigars*. Originally, wedding rings were to be banned as well. Unbelievably, maximum security prisoners are only allowed three pairs of underpants, two singlets, and no cassette tapes, bedspreads or sunglasses.

Even unsentenced prisoners are affected—they are allowed only two sets of clothes for visiting. At the moment in NSW there are 1000 people on remand, awaiting trial, who spend an average 4 months in jail. This is more than any other state in Australia.

What is the reason for this outrage? To stop prisoners from concealing drugs and syringes, of course. Yabsley maintains that convicts use personal items as currency in exchange for contraband. And you thought thongs were to protect your feet.

This injustice comes in the wake of the alleged stabbing of a prison warden with a blood-filled syringe. The warden later tested HIV-positive. The screws threatened to strike, demanding that prisoners with HIV be segregated. The government refused. No doubt the restrictions on personal property are partly to appease the screws. These are the same caring souls who refuse to distribute condoms to prisoners.

With any luck, the riots will spread to become a repeat of the unrest in the 70's which forced the then government to bring in the reforms which Yabsley has since overturned.

—by Anne Kennelly

ISO NEWS

Weekend camp to discuss oppression

MELBOURNE branch of the ISO is holding a weekend camp in the Dandenongs on the weekend of 12 to 14 October.

Called "Sex, race and class—a Marxist analysis of oppression", the camp will feature talks on "What is op-

pression?", "Have gays always been oppressed?", "Sexuality and alienation", "Can the family wither away under capitalism?" and "Black liberation in America—a Marxist analysis".

Non-members are welcome to all or part of the weekend. For details and cost, phone us on (03) 629 3148.

SOCIALIST MEETINGS

MELBOURNE

Melbourne branch of the International Socialist Organisation meets every MONDAY night at 7.30pm at Bookmarks, 1st floor, 328 Flinders St, City. For further details ring 629 3148.

Should the West consume itself? Monday 15 October.

Are consumers in the West responsible for the problems of the Third World? Monday 22 October.

South Africa—on the brink of civil war, Tuesday 23 October.

Why are ANC and Inkatha supporters fighting, and what do socialists say? Tuesday 30 October.

DEBATE

The Environment: Is Population a Problem? Monday 29 October, 7.30pm, at Bookmarks, 328 Flinders St, City.

Speakers: Geoff Mosley (ACF councillor and member of the Australian Democrats) and David Lockwood (ISO).

Can the market save Russia? Monday 5 November.

As the Russian economy crumbles, will the "free market" provide a solution? Monday 12 November.

BRISBANE

Brisbane branch of the International Socialist Organisation meets every TUESDAY night at 7.00pm at Bookmarks, 2nd floor, 99 Elizabeth St, City. For further details ring 229 8832.

Fascism—what is it and how to fight it, Tuesday 16 October.

The National Front in France and the Republicans in Germany are polling well. Are they fascists? How should the left respond? Imperialism and war, Tuesday 23 October.

Where does war come from and how can it be stopped? The return of the crisis in Eastern Europe, Tuesday 30 October.

Were the rebellions that rocked Eastern Europe last year against socialism? Tuesday 6 November.

The Iranian working class made the revolution against the Shah, but power ended up in the hands of the Mullahs. What happened? Tuesday 13 November.

CANBERRA

Canberra branch of the International Socialist Organisation meets every MONDAY night at 7.00pm at Trades Hall, 4 Goulburn St, City. For details of further meetings write to PO Box 17, Jamison Centre, 2314.

Rosa Luxemburg: The Mass Strike, Monday 15 October.

Luxemburg drew lessons for successful working class action from the experience of the 1905 revolution in Russia. Tuesday 22 October.

SYDNEY

Sydney branch of the International Socialist Organisation meets every TUESDAY night at 7.00pm at Trades Hall, 4 Goulburn St, City. For further details ring 254 6306.

German reunification, Tuesday 16 October.

Is the united Germany a defeat for the left? What are the prospects for reunification? Tuesday 23 October.

What is the real position of women in Islamic countries? Should we judge our support for movements in these countries on this basis? Tuesday 30 October.

Does democratic centralism have to be like it was claimed to be in the defeated communist parties in the East? Tuesday 6 November.

The struggle against fascism in Germany, Tuesday 13 November.

Why did the Nazis come to power and how they could have been stopped. Tuesday 20 November.

HOBART

Hobart branch of the International Socialist Organisation holds regular Marxist study groups. For details write to GPO Box 1698, Hobart 7001.

Like many service workers, members are reluctant to take action which inconveniences the public, and would rather rely purely on pub-

CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE LUCKY COUNTRY...

Wages changes offer chance to fight

HEADLINES LIKE "ACTU Seeking 'Carcasses'" suggest that the wage-cutting system of the past seven years is about to collapse.

The metalworkers have already struck once. Unions covering the Murdoch press are being encouraged by the ACTU to combine for an unprecedented push for CPI, super and productivity rises.

Public sector union officials openly talk of linking up with other unions, even the metalworkers, if the government won't pay them their full wages claim.

Does this mean the Accord is really washed up? Of course not. The

government realises that simple, blatant wage cutting of the sort we've seen since 1983 can't be pushed much further.

But they, the ACTU and the bosses still want workers to pay for their attempts to revamp the Australian economy.

Across the board schemes, such as award restructuring in the previous wage round, were the first step. Now they want to gear productivity bargaining to the needs of particular industries and eventually to the needs of individual enterprises.

The two cost of living rises under the new system will be paid months

after the prices have risen. Promised superannuation rises won't pay the bills today. And with a CPI blowout likely, the government and ACTU are already talking about tax cuts, covered by increased oil tax revenue, rather than full indexation of wages.

The union leaderships are already pegging the productivity-linked claims as low as they can. In the public sector the claim is only for 4 to 6 per cent, despite the fact that many workers may be up to 30 per cent behind their private sector equivalents.

But for all its problems, the current claim can also offer opportunities. If the bosses won't do a deal, the officials will have to organise a small, but real, campaign. That means workers will be given some choice to fight.

In the metals industry some shops were able to extract wage rises without giving anything away during the two tier and later award restructuring deals.

Workers in Social Security and Veterans Affairs have fought and won against government attacks, despite the usual attempts at bureaucratic compromises, because the rank and file controlled the dispute.

If we organise and fight like them, all workers can win in this wages round.

—by Liz Ross

Vic unionists defy library cuts

THE CAMPAIGN to preserve jobs, services and conditions at the State Library of Victoria has released a creativity amongst staff that rarely finds an outlet at work.

Last month, workers at the Library marched down Swanston St and rallied outside the office of new Arts Minister Kennan. We chanted, "Cut Kennan Instead". Student groups came along, and a genealogists' society brought their own banner.

Staff with placards also gathered outside the official celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Latrobe section of the library, joined by an unaccountably resurrected Governor Latrobe and his wife (resembling two union members) in full dress.

Staff take pride in providing a valuable service. But proposed cuts include a 24% reduction in hours of opening, including Sunday mornings and public holidays when working people are more free to come in. Cuts will also abolish jobs in several areas and reduce income from shift penalties.

Members have voted unanimously to maintain fulltime Sunday work, in defiance of closures due to start this month, until we have reached a settlement that maintains all services, jobs and conditions. This is not simply an unpaid workday, since we will still be allocated time off through the week for working Sunday mornings.

Our next union meeting will consider a motion for industrial action to recoup any money not paid for this work.

Like many service workers, members are reluctant to take action which inconveniences the public, and would rather rely purely on pub-



RIGHT-WING parliamentarian Fred Nile was met by an angry crowd when he led 1,000 followers to "clean up" Kings Cross on 1 October.

While ignoring assaults by the christians, police responded by arresting 20 demonstrators—for such offences as throwing condoms. Many were injured in the process. 17 demonstrators were jammed into one cell, and they were questioned about their income, rent, HIV status and even their gender!

The police showed yet again that they are as much our enemies as Nile, and a good deal more powerful. We need to emphasise building our own strength through demos like this one over trying to work with them.

—by Robert Stainsby

Teachers fight for jobs

VICTORIA'S secondary teachers have begun a campaign against the most savage cuts by any government in years.

The Ministry of Education wants to slash 3,600 jobs, most of them in secondary schools and school support services.

The teachers who are left would have to teach longer hours, bigger classes and with fewer resources—and this at a time when major changes are taking place with the introduction of the new Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

On September 18, VSTA members voted to step up the bans that are already in place by putting an immediate ban on VCE, and for rolling stoppages next term.

This action is fairly weak, but it's a start, and militants will have to argue the need for stronger strike action in the future.

The more right-wing primary teacher's union (VTU) and the technical teachers' union (TTU) have so far refused to join the VSTA's campaign. However, some technical school teachers refused to scab on their fellow unionists and joined the strike.

We need unity, but not at any price. Unity has to be built around a fighting campaign. We must not compromise our action for the sake of a false unity that would enable the government to proceed with the cuts without any serious opposition.

Runway

THE ENVIRONMENTAL Impact Statement for the Sydney airport third runway was immediately greeted by the press as coming out in favour of the project.

That's not what the EIS says if you read it carefully. It is really a PR job to play down the negative factors and highlight the cost of alternatives like better air traffic management or a second Sydney airport.

Exposing the EIS's fudges and dodgy figures will not stop the third runway—it's ambiguity has a point. If there is a large, angry public outcry against the proposal, the government will find reasons in the EIS for not proceeding. Otherwise it will use the EIS to justify going ahead.

The task now for the runway's opponents is to use the EIS to mobilise people in the streets to force the government to take the first option.

—by Anne Picot

SLOW

Ralph told how pickets had also been set up at two other Leighton's sites in Melbourne.

At one site in Broadmeadows no concrete has been poured for over a week. Both these pickets have been able to disrupt deliveries, significantly slowing construction.

Flying pickets have also been visiting Readymix batching yards. At one yard drivers employed by Readymix blocked the yards entrance to prevent owner drivers from taking concrete out.

Although scabs have continued to work at the 417 St Kilda Rd site, it has only been with massive police protection and progress has been slow.

Ralph told the meeting the picket was still very solid with about 40 workers regularly attending the daily meetings.

Despite legal action against a dozen of the picketers and the jailing of a number of them, Leighton's is no closer to settling the dispute. Workers with court orders preventing them from picketing the 417 site have been organising flying pickets on other Leighton's sites.

Meanwhile, BLF organiser John Cummins was jailed in late September for the third time, this time for 60 days, for the crime of standing on the 417 picket line. Two others were also jailed.

Leighton's will now really be feeling the pinch. It was rumored that if Melbourne got the Olympics they would have won significant contracts, as a reward for bringing on this dispute.

The Government and the media have twisted the dispute to appear as if it is a BLF-inspired

The Police's greatest hits

VICTORIAN Police Commissioner, Kel Glare, was ecstatic when Manchester Unity agreed to sponsor that state's Police Band.

"The Victoria Police bands are not soft options in policing," he claimed. "They... are proof that we seek a more caring society for all Victorians."

So we can look forward to the conductor's baton instead of the police baton from now on.

Instead of harassing homeless kids, cops are going to sing them *On the Street Where You Live*.

They won't tear-gas prisoners any more, they'll just play *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*.

And instead of verbalising down at the station, they'll croon *I'm going to sit right down and write myself a letter. And make believe it came from you.*

Cruel Britannia

SEVENTY years ago the British air force was



CHEAP SHOTS

ordered to control Iraq without actually occupying it. One way of doing that was to use mustard gas, suggested Winston Churchill.

Fortunately the RAF didn't take up the idea. They just used ordinary bombs on any suspected rebels. One time they dropped a 20 pounder near 100 horsemen. Two days later the pilot found that he'd bombed a display of equestrian skills at a wedding celebration.

Alma Mater

EX-CHIEF of Bond University, Don Watts, has a new job as the head of Darwin's low-tech Trade Development Zone.

That's where Asian workers come for as little as \$200 a month, where they can't strike or bring their families and are subject to curfews, alcohol and gambling bans.

Wonder where Don will recruit his managers?

Say, isn't there a uni on the Gold Coast that trains bosses for just that kind of business...?

areas," says the paper. "It's the same people, the same drugs, the same money," said one Panamanian. "The invasion hasn't changed anything. There is as much coming through as ever," added a pilot who has been flying drugs for a decade.

Novel approach

ALAN Jones, Sydney radio announcer and ex-Rugby Union coach, writes a right-wing opinion column in Sydney's *Sun-Herald*. He devoted a recent one to the Gulf crisis, quoting from what he claimed were US and USSR reports.

Actually they were quotes from Frederick Forsyth's latest novel. Jones admitted that he received his material through the mail and didn't check on it.

Crack troops?

REMEMBER George Bush's promise that his invasion of Panama would end its organised drug trade? According to the *New York Times*, the flow of drugs from Panama has increased at the rate of 100 per cent since the end of Mr Noriega's harsh military rule has instead given smugglers new unlimited access to many rural landing fields and coastal

Retirement benefits

IF YOU think that politicians love the perks of office, what about ex-politicians? Ex-Labor leader, Bill

Hayden, promised to sell the Governor-General's two Rolls-Royces when he took on the job. He still has them.

And ex-WA Inc Premier, Peter Dowding, still has the use of an official Ford LTD with an option to buy

it (sales tax free of course). The WA government is even ready to air freight it from Perth to Dowding's new job in Sydney and supply a chauffeur. But Dowding's no parasite, he knocked back the chauffeur.

May we quote you?

"Both *The Australian* and the *Financial Review* performed some spectacular ideological contortions in supporting a publicly financed bail-out of the Farrow investors instead of the market solution that John Cain had originally offered."

—Journalism professor Ciem Lloyd

"The greater truth is more important than the minor truth."

—Ex-Labor minister Evan Walker, explaining why it's OK to lie

"My position has been that we must defend our allies, protect our national interests and contribute to world stability."

—Jesse Jackson, "alternate" candidate for the

GRAHAM WILLETT ASKS:

Is Saddam

HE'S THE new hate figure of the 1990s.

To the frenzied press, Saddam Hussein is "the most dangerous man in the world", "a megalomaniac who is steeped in blood up to his elbows", "so evil that he should have been killed at birth".

But is he really the new Hitler?

ADOLF HITLER was a genocidal maniac. He headed up a state that had an insatiable appetite for taking over its weaker neighbours.

Saddam, we are supposed to believe, fits this mould. Most ordinary workers believe (mistakenly) that if the British had stopped Hitler early enough, we could have avoided World War II. Calling Hussein the "new Hitler" is to get us behind the US attempt to stop him "now". But the comparison is pretty thin.

There is no doubt that Hussein is a nasty piece of work. Most dictators are. He rules his country with an iron fist and his opponents are as often killed as jailed. Basic civil rights like freedom of speech and assembly, and the right to protest, are ruthlessly suppressed.

His invasion and annexation of Kuwait was an act of violence and his army of occupation has shown itself capable of brutality.

But Hussein is not any worse than the dozens of other dictators the West has been happy enough to do business with over the years.

KILLED

Chile's Pinochet, Indonesia's Suharto, Zaire's Mobutu—these and others have killed millions of people, repressed their opponents, and threatened their neighbours without the name of Hitler popping up at all.

Bush's war in Panama, Thatcher's in Ireland evoke not criticism but praise from the western press. Israel's occupation of Palestine is propped up by billions in US aid.

Is Hussein any worse than the Kuwaiti royal family, who the Western allies are telling us we should die to defend? The al-Sabahs denied all democratic rights for a decade before being forced to re-open

the powerless parliament and let some 60,000 male subjects vote, out of a population of two million.

The treatment of Asian women working as house-servants for the Kuwaiti elite was so horrendous, the allegations of rape, whippings and cruelty so numerous, that the Sri Lankan government banned any more going.

Is it any wonder there was so little resistance inside Kuwait to Saddam's annexation?

BUT WHAT made Hitler such a figure of terror to the West's rulers was not his violence against the German people but his desire to establish Germany as the major power in the world—a desire that was backed with real economic and military force.

Germany on the eve of World War II was one of the largest and most modern industrial economies in the world.

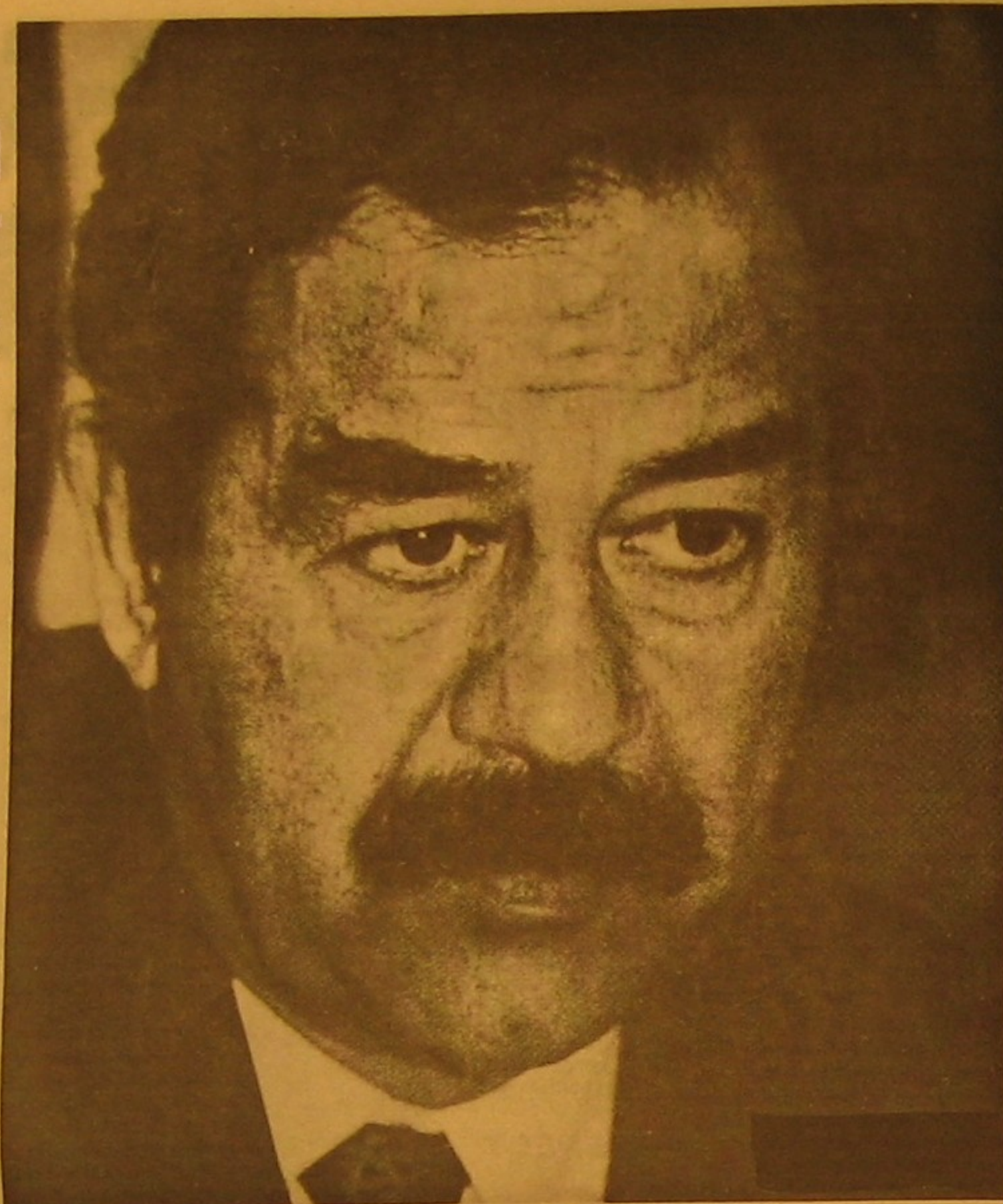
It had a larger population and a larger industrial workforce than Britain, its main rival in Europe. Its industrial base was far stronger; its army and airforce enormous. Its ability to wage war was second only to that of the United States, equal to Russia's, equal to Britain and France combined.

Germany's conquest of Poland, France and the Low Countries strengthened its power tremendously, making it the strongest single country in the world. It took Russia, Britain and the US combined three long years to destroy German power.

How ridiculous to compare Iraq to this colossus!

Leaving aside the microstates like Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, Iraq is no stronger than its neighbours. Much less is it a threat to the world balance of power.

It has a population of about six-



teen million, slightly more than its old enemies Syria and Saudi Arabia, about a third that of Iran. Its vaunted army of one million is a hodgepodge of battle-hardened veterans of the Iranian War, young and ill-trained recruits and untested reservists.

These men and women may well fight ferociously in defence of their homes but are little threat to anyone else.

BILLIONS

It should not be forgotten that Iraq's very limited victory over Iran was made possible only by billions of dollars in credits and weapons provided by the West and Iraq's neighbours and, in the end, by open US intervention in the Gulf.

The reality is that Iraq's economy is not up to another sustained

war, especially if it is entirely on its own.

Even its conquest of Kuwait has given it nothing but more oil (which it cannot sell at the moment) and a hodgepodge of battle-hardened veterans of the Iranian War, young and ill-trained recruits and untested reservists.

Unlike Hitler's Germany, Iraq is a small and purely regional power. Its Gross Domestic Product in the mid-1980s was about \$40 billion, barely double the size of tiny Kuwait's, a mere third the size of Saudi Arabia's and, with a similar

population, less than a sixth of Australia's.

The US GNP of \$3,000 billion shows what a pygmy Iraq is in world terms.

Nor is its economy particularly modern. Despite state control of huge slabs of the economy and years of development plans, Iraq still only gets 6% of its GNP from its manufacturing sector. Forty percent of the labour force works on the land, many of them producing barely enough to meet their own needs.

OIL is one of Iraq's two main exports (the other is dates!) and it brings in more than 95% of foreign earnings.

But most of this money goes straight back out of the country again to pay for raw materials and spare parts for its factories, food, debt repayment and, of course, arms—until a couple of months ago, supplied mostly from the West.

In recent years, though, the price of oil has been falling. Before the invasion it was, after allowing for inflation, at one of the lowest levels in twenty years—sharply squeezing the Iraqi economy.

OPEC, the oil producers' cartel, was deeply divided over how to deal with this. Some members wanted to cut prices and increase market share; others to reduce output and force up the price through shortening supply. The OPEC meeting in July produced a half-baked compromise.

DESPERATION

Hence, Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Not the action of a crazed dictator bent on conquering the world but rather an act of desperation, aimed at increasing his share of total oil supply and sales.

Indeed, he had already warned the US ambassador to Iraq of his plans, condemning Kuwait as "enemies of Iraqi people", and saying he would not tolerate its "economic war against Iraq".

In response, the US ambassador had told Hussein that "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts" and had repeatedly assured him that President Bush had "directed the US administration to reject the suggestion of implementing trade sanctions against Iraq".

West would not interfere—turned out to be wrong. A total economic blockade was slapped in place very quickly by the US (and later ratified by the United Nations).

Even if food is allowed in, Iraq's economy will be quickly strangled. Its fundamental weakness is revealed by the way that all major development projects have ground

Saddam's fatal weakness

to a halt already, because they cannot proceed without Western money and Western technicians.

SADDAM HUSSEIN's economic and military weakness is bad enough but his real weakness is political.

The awful truth is that Adolf Hitler was not a random madman but the creation of Germany's dreadful economic and political crisis of the 1920s and 30s.

He offered the ruling class a chance to destroy the power of the working class movement and to build an empire in Europe and North Africa that would enhance their national power.

To the middle classes, shattered and enraged by decades of grinding crisis, he offered patriotic fervour and scapegoats to give them the illusion of strength. A national movement that swept all before it underpinned Hitler's extraordinary period in power.

Saddam Hussein has none of this. His murderous assault on the Iraqi Communist Party and the trade unions is remembered bitterly by workers.

HATRED

His cold-blooded use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians has earned him the undying hatred of Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities. His 1987 demand that women give up their jobs and education in order to raise more babies has further weakened whatever support he might have hoped for.

Nor will his sudden posing as a champion of Arab unity and anti-imperialist struggle do him much good. Certainly there have been demonstrations in support of Iraq against the US and its allies in many Arab cities, but these are despite Hussein's record, not because of it.

Hussein and his party—the Arab Ba'athist Socialist Party—are fervent supporters of Arab unity—in words. In practice they are the sworn enemies of the only other Ba'athist regime in the region, their next door neighbour Syria. Far from uniting their two countries, the Ba'athist Parties see each other as worse than Western imperialism or Israel.

Nor is his support for Palestine any more authentic. Hussein unleashed assassins against the PLO because that organisation was siding with Syria in the early 1980s, and he did nothing to support the Palestinians against massacre by the Jordanian army in 1970.

He was more than happy to accept US aid against Islamic Iran when it looked as though he might be losing the war he launched against the revolutionary regime.

THE REAL issue in the Gulf today is the imperialist invasion of the region.

In that sense, it is not Hussein, but George Bush, Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev who are most like Hitler, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt before them—standing at the head of predatory great powers determined to impose their will on weaker nations.

That's why we hope to see the US and its allies defeated. To "appease" Saddam Hussein—which Bob Hawke warns us against so sternly—is not to risk or invite a Hitler-style takeover of the region, much less the world.

Saddam arouses hope and pride amongst tens of millions in the Arab world because he has been thrown—completely against his own wishes—into conflict with his former mates, the people running the imperialist system that so brutally oppresses the Arab people.

That was never true of Hitler.



A death in the family?

TO THOSE who loudly trumpet the triumph of capitalism, the Socialist Scholars Conference, held in Sydney at the end of September, was a poke in the eye.

It brought together over a thousand people from all over Australia for three days to tackle head on the most difficult question we face—what is the future for socialism?

But while the conference was an organisational success and a pleasing confirmation of the resilience of the left, it was a political disappointment.

Indeed, some speakers sounded more like they were at a funeral than a celebration of the continuing relevance of socialism. Indeed, Giovanni Arrighi argued that Stalinism was part of the family of Marxism, even if it was the criminal member.

So for him, the conference was a wake—after all he's just seen a death in the "family"!

To admit Stalinism as a component—no matter how perverted—of Marxism, is to not only discredit Marxism, but to change its fundamental content.

At the heart of Marx's politics was the new, revolutionary class in society, the proletariat. Marxism explained how the workers could liberate all of humanity from oppression by overthrowing capitalism and reconstructing society on a co-operative basis.

Far from being "part of the family" of Marxism, Stalinism was its negation. It first emerged in 1924, as the bureaucracy of the declining workers' state in Russia rejected world revolution and set out to organise national economic development in rivalry with the West.

This was not a strategy for socialism, but for the accumulation of capital in a backward country—beginning with a massive assault on the working class and peasantry, and using the state to mobilise all resources to build heavy industry and arms.

Its very success contained the seeds of its downfall as it brought together huge concentrations of workers who were completely alienated from any control over production or society.

The result has been a series of gigantic working class uprisings in the East—from 1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Hungary, the resistance to the tanks in Prague in 1968 and Solidarity in Poland in 1980-81—the most profound challenge to any ruling class since the Spanish revolution of 1936.

And this, after all, is the point of Marxism—to explain

the actual class struggle, explain its roots in the relations of production that dominate society, and draw out how it can go forward.

The problem at the Socialist Scholars Conference was that despite their emphatic rejection of Stalinism, the majority saw the revolution in Eastern Europe as a tremendous defeat for the left, discounting the central role of the working class in the revolution, and diminishing the importance of the space now opened up for independent working class politics and organisation.

In other words, for all the undoubtedly sincere rejection of Stalinism, the regimes of the East were seen as somehow better than western capitalism—as "post-capitalist", "socialist", or whatever.

Ralph Miliband told us that there was nothing to defend in the old Stalinist regimes; nevertheless, the events in Eastern Europe were a "soft counter-revolution". Did this mean that socialists were to stand on the sidelines during a counter-revolution? What incredible confusion!

change

No wonder many speakers were pessimistic about change. Giovanni Arrighi saw the future of Marxism lying in the universities—away from the sordid business of actually fighting the system—and others dipped back into the garbage bin of history to resuscitate political figures long discredited and discarded.

Robin Blackburn and Andrew Milner argued that Kautsky had been right about the Russian revolution, and Ephraim Nimni promoted the Austro-chauvinist, Otto Bauer, as an alternative authority on the national question to Lenin.

This all culminated in a final session on "The future for socialism" at which six speakers told us we need to discuss our differences, but (with the refreshing exception of a speaker from NZ) singularly failed to do so themselves, preferring instead diplomacy and lists of issues that matter.

The Socialist Scholars Conference brought many together who are looking for those answers. Unfortunately, there were too few answers from either the superstars of Marxism or the organisers. But then, they have just had a death in their family, and we have not.

Today, there is in most countries an enormous gulf between the two. In the advanced West, the working class has suffered fifteen years of defeat and retreat, facilitated by the official left in parties like the ALP. These defeats have made the politics of workers' revolution seem remote, in contrast to the confidence of the early 1970s. For the socialist movement in the West to rebuild mass influence requires a turnaround in the class struggle, something we can have only a marginal impact on. The idea that there is a huge vacuum to the left of the Labor Party, that there are thousands of people just waiting for a nice socialist organisation to join, is demoralising nonsense. Participants at the conference repeatedly referred to the crisis facing both western capitalism and social-democracy as the boom of the 1980s collapses into recession and military adventures. But a revival of struggle and hatred of the bosses will not necessarily mean that socialists again become a force. All kinds of populist and right wing elements can benefit from mass disillusionment with the system. Our future depends on our politics and our ability to connect Marxism with the day to day struggles of workers. This requires a relentless attack on the whole tradition of the Accord, industry-union co-operation and the nationalist politics that underpin them. It means a trenchant defence of the working class, here and internationally, as the central force for change. It means arguing inside the movements that the struggle against oppression and environmental destruction is linked to the class struggle. It means defending the political tradition of Leninism, and especially the Russian revolution, distinguishing it from the Stalinist counter-revolution. And it means actively building disciplined, democratic and intellectually vigorous organisations that can attract to their ranks the individuals who today are searching for answers. The Socialist Scholars Conference brought many together who are looking for those answers. Unfortunately, there were too few answers from either the superstars of Marxism or the organisers. But then, they have just had a death in their family, and we have not.

—by Phil Griffiths

Women and Islam in the Middle East

HOW CAN we defend Iraq given their treatment of women?

By Janey Stone

First we make clear that the Ba'athist regime's repression of women is something we totally oppose.

Family law is based on Islamic law, which does not recognise women as complete human beings. The regime emphasises the primacy of the family: procreation is primarily the family's responsibility and "the state must encourage its intensification".

Polygamy is still legal and men can obtain divorce much more easily than women. Women are still murdered for infringing sex taboos. The penalty ranges from 6 months to 3 years in jail, the same as that for killing a cow.

But Iraq is not essentially different to other countries

in the region. Saudi Arabia for example is a thoroughly conservative country where women are not even allowed to drive cars. In Pakistan and Malaysia fornication and adultery are punished by stoning and the lash yet these countries remain solidly within the imperialist camp.

But how relevant is this to the position we take on the current crisis?

In times of conflict it is traditional to dwell on emotional accounts of the savagery of the enemy towards women. The current propaganda also has a particular angle. It seems that Arabs, and particularly radical Islamic currents, have replaced communists as popular bogeys.

When the western press focusses on Islam it is selective in the extreme. Let's consider two examples in a little more detail: female circumcision and the veil.

Female circumcision, or surgical removal of the clitoris, is an outrageous attack on women's bodies and to be unreservedly condemned. But it is wrong to imagine that it has been restricted to "barbaric" countries and religions.

OPERATION

Victorian England also carried out the operation on women who were "suffering from" too great an interest in their clitorises. As recently as 1948 a clitoridectomy was performed on a 5 year old girl in the US as a "cure" for masturbation. Other female organs were

also removed. Medically accepted indications for removal of normal ovaries included period problems, persecution mania, "eating like a ploughman" and "simple cussedness".

Restrictive dress fashions meant women sometimes had ribs removed to fit into 40 cm waists. This was at the time when Britain was bringing its "civilising" influence to Arab and other third world countries.

Criticism of female circumcision has to be placed in the context of the society in which it occurs. As an African women's organisation points out, while firmly condemning the practice, such women "are usually among those who cannot even satisfy their basic needs and who have to struggle daily for survival." In such circumstances many superstitious and

oppressive customs are preserved.

The fight against genital mutilation must be placed in the context of "ignorance, obscurantism, exploitation, poverty" and must "question the structures and social relations which perpetuate this situation".

The veil is associated with Islam but in fact was originally a city custom showing that a man was wealthy enough to support his wife. As with the English custom of light corsets, it demonstrated that the woman did not do heavy physical work.

In more recent times it has continued to be associated with work. For example, in Iran, Reza Shah, put into power by the British, declared the veil illegal in 1936, with the intention of increasing the number of women in the workforce and boosting

production. There were violent scenes as soldiers tore the veils from the heads of women who resisted, ungrateful for their "liberation".

Islamic militants fight to impose their views on others but is the history of Christianity so different? From the crusades, through the Inquisition to the missionaries of the colonial period, Christians have imposed their religion and oppression of women on masses of the world population.

Millions were burnt at the stake as witches, Joan of Arc was condemned for wearing men's clothing, and the early settlers of the United States crushed women to death for adultery.

Indeed, in many states of the US adultery remains a crime punishable by a long jail sentence.

LIKE all religions, Islam is contradictory. Many of its ideas are reactionary, but in an oppressive and alienating world, it offers comfort to the oppressed.

It is often the mosques that people turn to to help organise resistance when their lives are uprooted by predatory capitalism; or when they face brutal racism in the West.

This can lead to the paradox of anti-imperialist women in Iran demanding the veil be used. By contrast, in the major powers, religious fundamentalism can serve to justify racism and imperialism.

Born-again Christian fundamentalists are influential politically in the West including in the anti-abortionist movement. Jewish fundamentalism is also on the increase. In

Israel there is no secular divorce or marriage, and all family law is administered by religious courts, placing women at a marked disadvantage not so different from those in Islamic countries. Fundamentalist political parties there are pushing for restrictions on abortion rights.

Women in Arab countries have a substantial history of fighting against their oppression.

FIRST

In Iraq, they did so against the British. While Turkey introduced reforms in the 1920s, the British mandate regime in Iraq made only minor changes to the old Ottoman law. Women raised demands for education for girls and the dropping of the veil in the

1920s and 1930s. In the uprising in 1944 women led demonstrations, took part in strikes and were killed by police bullets. In 1952 the League for the Defence of Women's Rights campaigned for national liberation, women's and children's rights and against the monarchy.

When the Ba'athists seized power in 1963 thousands of its members were arrested, tortured and executed.

In Iran, women were among the first to organise opposition to Khomeini's repressive laws soon after his rise to power. Over 15000 demonstrated on International Women's Day in 1979, demanding equal rights and against the imposition of the veil. The slogan was "With veil and without veil, we opposed the shah, with veil and without veil, we will march to uphold freedom. Till the

day of our liberation". The imperialist camp is always highly selective in its complaints about human rights abuses. Colonel Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein are "terrorists" and "war mongers". Meanwhile Israel's treatment of Palestinians, including women prisoners in the notorious Ansar camp, goes uncriticised.

Malaysia, where fornication also is punished by the lash, is a close ally. The Western imperialists are no friends of those who wish to liberate women from repression.

Women in many Arab countries have participated in the fight against exploitation and oppression. Palestinian women today are playing a leading role in the intifada. It is to such struggles we must look for the liberation of women.

How can we end military madness?

AS GEORGE BUSH prepares for war against Iraq, millions around the world are worried about the future and angry that our rulers so easily resort to barbarities to get their way.

As a result, many blame Saddam for the crisis—after all, it was he who invaded and annexed Kuwait. The business of invading and annexing weaker countries is a threat to the peace of the world and must be stopped. As a result, there are many—including Rainbow Alliance, the Democrats, the German Greens and the New Left Party—who would be ready to support Bush and his blockade if only he would act under the auspices of the United Nations.

The argument flows from a bitter hostility to all war, no matter who starts it. Yet ironically it ends up promoting the use of a vast military arsenal—one in the hands of the world's great military powers—to discipline a small, relatively weak country.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Lenin, too, had to address these questions and his pamphlet, *Socialism and War*, is one of the Marxist classics.

"Socialists have always condemned war between nations as barbarous and brutal," he began. But unlike pacifists, we don't condemn all wars.

In history there have been numerous wars which, in spite of all the horrors, atrocities, distress and suffering that inevitably accompany all wars, were progressive, i.e. benefited the development of mankind by helping to destroy the exceptionally harmful and reactionary institutions.

Lenin went on to discuss a series of progressive wars—the wars to defend and then extend the French revolution, which "ushered in a new epoch in the history of mankind". There were the English Civil War, the American War of Independence and the Civil War.

To the list of progressive wars, Lenin added wars waged by the colonies and oppressed nations against the great powers that kept them down.

Tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, India on England, Persia or China on Russia, and so forth, those would be "just," "defensive" wars, "respective of who attacked first," and every Socialist would sympathize with the victory of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slave-owning, predatory "great" powers.

To Lenin's list we may add from our own experience that the war to liberate Vietnam from American domination was one of the great victories for ordinary people this century. It profoundly weakened the world's greatest power and held it back from invading a series of rebellious countries, not least Nicaragua.

Drawing on Clausewitz, Lenin was making that point that "War is the continuation of politics by other [ie violent] means." In other words, "We deem it necessary... to study each war separately."

In 1915, this meant explaining the imperialist and predatory nature of the World War and its utterly reactionary character. It meant sharply breaking with those "socialists" who had supported their own ruling class "in defence of the fatherland."

Today it means understanding that Iraq's annexation of Kuwait is no longer the issue, rather it is the imperialist invasion of the region and the attempt to strengthen America's ability to dictate to the Arab people and ultimately the rest of the world.

CENTRAL to Lenin's analysis was an understanding that violence and war are inescapable and fundamental components of the



LEFT: NORTH VIETNAMESE soldiers in action against America. Their war was a progressive one; their victory a gigantic defeat for the warmongers.

Lenin's strategy can be seen in the fact that the policy of "turning the imperialist war into civil war" actually led to the great Russian revolution of 1917.

Furthermore, it was the German revolution of 1918-19 that actually ended the First World War. The first Russian workers' revolution in 1905, was sparked by the crisis caused by war with Japan. And the Second World War was followed by a wave of uprisings throughout Europe and Asia, and mutinies amongst hundreds of thousands of British soldiers throughout the world.

The Vietnam War saw enormous discontent amongst the soldiers. Indeed, in the last years of the war, the US army lost more of its officers killed by its own troops than by the Vietnamese. And at home, in Australia, America, and dozens of other countries, the war produced a profound radicalisation and the resurgence of revolutionary organisations.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Gulf conflict will do the same. Already there is an enormous radicalisation taking place in the region. Jordan's Ambassador to the US said the American presence "has produced a sense of radicalization and desperation [and] it will not produce stability." There have been huge demonstrations in Syria against Assad's support for the US, demonstrations which have taken tens of thousands of troops to suppress.

And in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, there is incredible support for Iraq as young Palestinians sense that the fate of the *infidels* is bound up with Iraq's ability to withstand the US assault.

TO BE for a US and Australian defeat is not necessarily to wish for the death of the American and Australian soldiers and sailors who have been sent to the Gulf.

Overwhelmingly they are from the working class, and a disproportionate number amongst the Americans are black. By fighting to force a US and Australian withdrawal, we are fighting to get them home safely. We can be no less concerned for the lives of the workers who make up Iraq's armed forces.

On the other side the Turtles are identified with America. They have broad American accents, use American street talk and eat lots of pizza. Even the Turtles' mentor Splinter, who is also a migrant, is seen more as an "American-Japanese". Although he is still a ninja master, he eats pizza with his boys. They are held together by their love for each other and by the struggle against evil.

The link between the Foot, Japan and cruelty is firmly made and an equally heavy hand is used to identify the Turtles with decency and American family values.

The villains have heavy Japanese accents that seem to come through even in grunts and screams, darker complexions and aggressive face masks that accent facial features. You are constantly reminded of the link between their nationality and the cruel acts they carry out.

April, when faced with an abduction in a deserted train station says, "What, haven't I kept up my Sony payments?" After Splinter is kidnapped by the Foot, he materialises in the Turtles' midst to lecture them about love and devotion.

As a result, the solution is an appeal for parents to care for their children, otherwise the kids will turn to the gangs for support.

—by Phil Griffiths

REVIEWS

LINDSAY MUNCKS reviews the Turtle movie

Racism on a half shell

"The last thing I need is Japanese emigrants and this feud".

Is *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* a harmless piece of child fiction with a certain appeal to adolescent adults?

All movies have something political to say and the Turtle movie has a lamination of ideas as full in meaning as any piece of classic cinema. A dig under the surface and the *Turtles* reveals itself as racist and reactionary.

A crime wave is sweeping New York, with a large gang called "The Foot Clan" among the culprits. The Foot uses unloved and rejected teenage boys to do its dirty work.

It has a cadre of balaclaved ninja fighters and is run by a ninja Master, The Shredder. He is dressed to look super-human with a robot voice and robes but still retains a Japanese accent and ninja appearance.

Led by this Japanese migrant, the Foot represents the systematized corruption of the city's rejected children. The scene from the mouldering basement of the Foots' abode shows the boys being taught ninja skills to be admitted to the ranks of the Clan's faceless warriors.

The Foot feeds from the cracks in American society. The heroine, a TV reporter called April O'Neill, makes the link when she finds that her boss's son joins the Foots when his middle-class father stops communicating with him.

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THE TURTLES: another dose of anti-Japanese racism dressed up as old-fashioned American values.

He tells them they have found the greatest gift, their bond as a family unit and love for each other. They return to the city and take on the Foot.

Naturally, our morally fortified heroes stomp on The Foot. When the misguided youth of the city see their once proud and powerful master defeated, the boys denounce their crimes and go off home to Mom and Pop.

The message in the film is simple. Japanese people who don't accept "American values", are a threat to American society, a threat to what is central to capitalism's most powerful country, the family.

This evil force has the ability to pervert the minds of the young and turn them into faceless gang members. And the cure for mindless violence and alienation? You guessed it: back to the bosom of the family.

Socialists reject these ideas. Migrants are not a threat to society. Crimes, gang warfare, anti-social behavior is symptomatic of a society that is alienated and poverty-ridden. It is not something specific to migrants nor is it imported when they move from one country to another.

The social breakdown that the movie highlights comes from within American society, not outside it. The movie makes no explanation for youth homelessness or family breakdown, blaming it instead on individual family members and the influence of non-Western migrants.

As a result, the solution is an appeal for parents to care for their children, otherwise the kids will turn to the gangs for support.

Reality for many homeless children is quite different. Society offers little hope or alternatives.

Australia is no stranger to anti-Japanese racism. Books

such as *The Third Wave* put forward similar ideas. They say that Japanese investment is rapidly taking over Australia, that Asian investment is different, cruel and oppressive to workers. They even blame declining living standards on Asian capital.

Leaving aside that this argument is unadulterated racist garbage, it provides a cover for Australian capitalists who are the same as all other capitalists. Their control over Australian workers is much greater and they should be given the lion's share of the blame for the problems we face as workers.

To suggest that Japanese bosses are inherently more cruel is to ignore the attacks carried out on us by the homegrown variety.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles paints Japanese as cruel, corrupt opportunists, profiting from the mistakes of middle class American families. It is the Americans that are made out as victims.

The movie is not just a simple amusing story. Criticism of its violent influence on children pales into insignificance when compared to its fundamentally racist message. A wolf in sheep's clothing.

Probably the highlight of the seven tracks is Bragg's version of *The Red Flag*, a song which is usually sung once a year by the British Labour Party.

—by Sandra Bloodworth

Billy Bragg draws the right lessons

Back in the March 1989 issue of *The Socialist*, I wrote an article about Billy Bragg, who was touring Australia and had just released his fourth album, *Workers' Playtime*.

I was highly critical of that album, arguing that Bragg had become "softer", that his lyrics were becoming less political. He himself said that he saw no point in writing an LP of "Thatcher is horrible" songs.

Well, I'm pleased to say that his latest offering, a mini-LP (seven songs) titled *The Internationale*, can in no way be accused of being "apolitical".

From the first track, a revised lyrics version of *The Internationale* (which he agreed to write because he thought the existing ones were "archaic and often un-singable"), through to the last, politics is always there in some form or another, often in a witty and entertaining way, but never boring.

Probably the highlight of the seven tracks is Bragg's version of *The Red Flag*, a song which is usually sung once a year by the British Labour Party.

But as Bragg says: "Here we have restored the original (tune), a sprightly reel, not a funeral dirge".

My favourite is *The Marching Songs of the Covert Battalions*, a song about the US Marines and their part in promoting American imperialism around the globe, a song which could easily be about any imperialist power.

We help the multi-nationals When they cry out protect us The locals scream and shout a bit

But we don't let that affect us.

On the last track, Eric Bogle's *My Youngest Son Came Home Today*, Bragg even confronts the Northern Ireland situation, which he rightly calls "a war that we send our soldiers to fight in and then wonder why our cities get bombed".

Maybe it's the rising struggle against Thatcher in Britain, especially over the Poll Tax, that has inspired Billy Bragg to bring out a record like this.

Whatever the reason, I for one welcome the change in his lyrics, and hopefully in his politics as well.

And it's possible they are changing. With a number of issues recently, the British Labour Party has shown that it can't be relied on to fight for working class interests, whether it be around the Poll Tax or the ambulance workers' dispute.

What has happened is that ordinary people are showing that they are the ones who can change things. It is they who pose the biggest threat to the Tories' plans, not Neil Kinnock and co.

In Bragg's "new" version of *The Internationale*, he concludes:

Although they offer us concessions Change will not come from above.

For a person who thought voting Labour was the only way to ever get a better society, this is a big step forward.

It could be that the events happening in front of his own eyes are teaching Billy Bragg, and hopefully thousands more as well, a thing or two.

—by Craig Kendal

The German Ideology: a Marxist guide to human nature

THE MARXIST CLASSICS

A series which looks at how the Marxist tradition developed and the relevance of the Marxist classics today.

THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY by Marx and Engels is a good start for anyone wanting to understand the Marxist conception of history, human nature and revolution.

They reject the idea that to change the world we simply have to convince people out of "wrong" ideas.

Instead, they argue we need to connect ideas and reality: to find the link between human beings, nature and society. "The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals."

What makes us human, and different from other animals? Humans "begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence."

History is about how humans have produced their means of existence: "What they are, therefore, coincides with their pro-

duction, both with what they produce and with how they produce."

In the late 1840s, this was not a completely new idea, but Marx and Engels had to explain the relationship of this fact to the ideas people hold and how to change society for the better.

Marx and Engels argued that "language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness." This seems to be a circular argument. But the starting point is the production of the means of life.

Marx and Engels argue "It is not consciousness that determines life but life that determines consciousness." So "liberation" is a historical act made possible by real existing humans, their activity and the products of that activity.

This was the starting point for an analysis of the possibilities of a society of liberation. In capitalist soc-

ety, individuals come together to produce, but not because of their own choice, but because of "a material power above us". Nevertheless, capitalism had begun to produce the necessary material basis of socialism by its tremendous development of the productive forces. But if the conditions were sufficient on their own, we would surely have communism by now. This is where Marx and Engels' theory of materialism is critical.

Workers grow up in a capitalist system, are dominated by its ideas and have no control over how it proceeds. The life activity of the workers, in particular

circumstances, is the crucial ingredient for changing society. This alteration "can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."

This is why revolutionary socialists always and at all times put their trust first and foremost in the living struggle of workers and the oppressed against the conditions of capitalism.

—by Sandra Bloodworth

The fight for the Amazon

THE DESTRUCTION of the Amazon rainforests is one of the great outrages of the century.

Yet when it comes to explaining why it's happening, there is all kinds of confusion and argument.

Malthusians argue that population pressure has forced peasants from the south of Brazil into the Amazon in search of land.

Others blame the hamburger connection, arguing that our desire for junk food encourages McDonalds to destroy the forests to raise cattle.

A more sophisticated argument is that Brazil's huge debt to western banks forces the Brazilian government to cut down the forests for export revenues.

Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn argue against all these reasons in their new and compelling book, *The fate of the forest: Developers, destroyers and defenders of the Amazon*.

According to them the hamburger connection does not stand up. They do not deny that the land is being cleared to graze cattle, but "cattle are used primarily as an excuse for claiming land, for clearing it and for economic purposes that have little to do with producing commodities".

Foot and mouth disease is so rife among herds in the Amazon that international health regulations forbid the sale of Amazonian beef. Brazil exports beef from its southern feedlots—the Amazon is actually a net importer of beef.

Hecht and Cockburn have figures that show that debt is not the fundamental reason for the destruction. Only 15% of Brazil's export earnings are produced within the Amazon. Aluminium and iron make up a lot of this. Rainforest wood does form an increasing proportion of exports, however most export timber has come from forests in southern Brazil.

The Malthusian argument gets short shrift too. There is migration into the Amazon basin, but that migration has not occurred because of population growth. Rather changes have been forced upon the small farmers in the south—the expansion of mechanised agriculture and the flooding of enormous areas of agricultural land forced small farmers out of their holdings".

These farmers have migrated north, searching for replacement land.

Hecht and Cockburn accept that migration, mining and large-scale developments like dams all contribute to the destruction of the Amazon. But they argue that the fundamental reason is none of these.

THE AMAZON is the site of one of the most rapid and large-scale enclosure movements in history as more than 100 million acres pass from public to private ownership.

As inflation in Brazil soared to 100% in the '70s and '80s land became an instrument of speculation—"an object of exchange rather than being an input into production". The value of land rose as much as 100% a year in real terms, and the value of land cleared as pasture usually exceeded that of forested land by at least 30%.

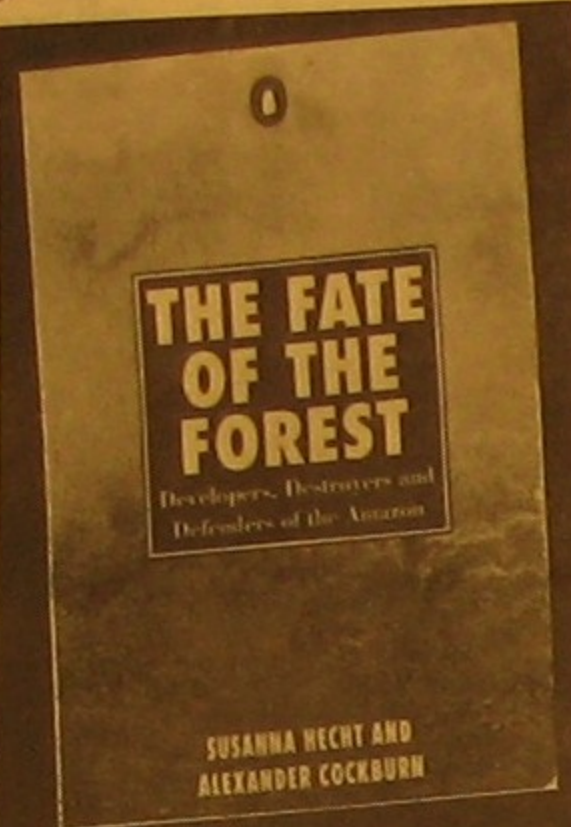
However, the overriding reason for this spectacular land clearance is that under Brazilian law, cleared forest is evidence of effective use—giving the person who cleared the land the strongest claim to the title of the land.

Thus the forest dwellers like the Indians or the rubber tappers, whose lifestyles do not require clearing the land, have very few legal recourses. Large landowners take what they want using violence and force. Often even the small farmers are evicted because land titles are meaningless. The state government of Mato Grosso, for example, issued titles to an area 12 million acres greater than the state. The large landowners have more economic and social muscle to be able to hold onto their lands.

The authors spell out clearly who is to blame for the destruction, violence and chaos—the Brazilian ruling class.

Following [the road] BR 158 we pass through a region where some of the largest ranches in all of Brazil are found, huge rangelands, some exceeding more than a quarter of a million acres, and carrying on their placards names of the great industrial and banking consortia and corporations of Brazil, as well as some of their multinational partners.

Or again: The millionaires of southern Brazil were installed in their great ranches along the Amazon's southern tier. The generals had



ANNE LAWSON reviews
The fate of the forest
by Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn (Penguin \$16.99)

unleashed forces beyond their control, and now the Amazon faced its apocalypse.

These capitalists, with the backing of the government, are inflicting widespread social and environmental destruction because of their desire to clear the land.

To stake their claim on the land they employ labour to clear the forest and then torch it, often only paying \$1 a day plus food. After the rains have doused the fires light aircraft are used to seed the land. But the brush continues to appear because the native plants are more successful than the exotic grasses, which often come from Africa where the soils are richer. If another fire doesn't remove the brush then chemicals like 2,4,5-T will be used.

The soil is strained by the cattle grazing and the leeching rains. It quickly becomes compacted and anaerobic. The removal of plant life increases the temperature. The result of the whole process means that it is extremely difficult for forest plants to recolonise and survive.

Thus the recovery of the forest is highly unlikely. But it also means that the land quickly becomes useless as pasture too. More than 50% of the cleared areas have been abandoned, frequently after just 10 years.

How then are these soils capable of supporting 250 metric tons of living material per acre? They can only do so when the vegetation is predominantly rainforest. Except for the flood plains most of the Amazonian soils are not very fertile as their molecular construction allows nutrients to be leached out. Even when fertilisers are applied the soils are unable to hold them for long.

When the area is covered in rainforest the nutrients are derived from and exchanged within the living forest and its litter. Plants have developed ways of extracting the nutrients as efficiently as possible. However when the forest is destroyed the forest litter and micro-organisms are easily washed away. Unless the plants are replaced the consequences of the destruction is not only that the ecosystem is degraded in the short term but also that the likelihood of recovery is severely limited.

The use of fire as a method of land clearance is not new. The Indians have been using it for centuries. The difference is of course that Indians use it in conjunction with other agricultural methods—methods which actually increase the diversity of species in the forest. But the large landowners have no regard for maintaining, much less increasing such diversity.

DAMAGE is not only inflicted on the environment. The Amazon area has always been inhabited, originally by indigenous tribal people and then by small farmers, rubber tappers and other extractive workers.

The lives and cultures of these people are being destroyed by the enclosure movement.

The large ranchers have no hesitation in

evicting forest dwellers, often using force. "Large landowners quite simply claimed areas to which the small settlers thought they had titles and drove them off with threats and gunshots."

And they do so with supreme arrogance. The UDR, an extreme rightwing organisation set up to represent the interests of the ranchers, argues that the small producer has no role in Brazilian agriculture. The founder, Ronaldo Caiado, believes that "The Amazon is ours to do what we want with". He also has stated,

It is not enough for people just to have land. You need to have "know-how", machines, credits and things like that. Since rural workers have none of those, their productivity is low.

He conveniently overlooks the one billion dollars that have been paid in direct subsidies to the large ranchers. Another leading member, Salvador Farina, has remarked that "the size of the holding only reflects the courage and the competence of the producer."

The UDR is thought to be behind many of the murders that have occurred. One wonders what courage is required to hire goons and thugs to kill and intimidate rural organisers, workers and their families.

But the forest dwellers do not accept things passively. As Hecht and Cockburn point out, "The suffering, dislocation and hatred engendered by these enclosures and evictions are at least as great as those that fired the European peasant revolts."

The current fighters are following a long tradition of resistance in the Amazon. *The fate of the forest*, along with Chico Mendes' book *Fight for the forest* describes how people are impelled to fight, often against incredible odds. More than 1000 rural workers, including Mendes, have died in conflicts since 1985. The legal system offers no solution for the poor. Acre, where there have been 900 death threats and murders, has a jury system that hears only 25 cases a year.

But still the fight goes on. Mendes describes one aspect of that fight—the *ocupação* or blockades. But Hecht and Cockburn realise that the fight needs to go beyond these. "The empates, while effective, were all ways an ad hoc solution since every inch of seringa (area of rubber groves) held was always liable to future attack."

So they also describe other forms of fight back, like the 1,200 settlers on BR 150, who... refused to leave their plots, and worked collectively so that they would be less vulnerable to threats of violence. They organised their own civilian protection so that military police and private armies would not be able to dislodge them.

However, *The fate of the forest* is an excellent and useful book. It gives a depth to the situation in the Amazon that I have not encountered elsewhere and should be read, along with *Fight for the forest* by Chico Mendes, by anyone who is interested in the struggle going on in Brazil.

reserves". On these reserves the use rights of the local population would be recognised but the holdings would be on long-term leases from the state, rather than privately owned. The people on the reserve would have control over health and education.

In other words, they (the rubber tappers) called for popular control over the means of production and distribution of forest commodities, along with the provision of financial credits to producers rather than middlemen. They also call for justice and legal protection of their rights to land and life.

Hecht and Cockburn go on to say, These are the concrete elements of a social-ist ecology—the only strategy that can save the Amazon and its inhabitants.

The concept behind the extractive reserves is what socialism is all about—that ordinary people, be they in the Amazon forests or the cities of Australia, should be able to have real control over production, what is produced and the way it is produced. Socialists therefore wholeheartedly support the demands of the forest people for such control, and support their fights to achieve it.

However, there are problems with the extractive reserves under the capitalist system, which Hecht and Cockburn point out.

Extractive reserves are vulnerable to incursions from the powerful... The leases themselves can be rescinded by the state... or [these reserves] cynically used by large landowners as another means of consolidating holdings.

As well the products from the extractive reserves will still need to compete nationally and internationally. Increasing the co-operative structure and removing the middlemen can only be a partial solution.

Hecht and Cockburn understand these problems but don't carry their own argument through to its logical conclusion—the overthrow of the capitalist system.

This is not simply demanding socialist rhetoric. The argument throughout *The fate of the forest* is that big businesses, large landowners, the multinationals and the Brazilian government are to blame for the environmental and social destruction.

The book clearly shows that it is necessary to unite and fight these forces. It also points out that the solution—the Amazon people taking control of their own lives—is not possible as things stand. To achieve that control it is necessary to remove those who are currently to blame and the system that spawned them.

It is unfortunate that Hecht and Cockburn don't take their argument that one step further. However, *The fate of the forest* is an excellent and useful book. It gives a depth to the situation in the Amazon that I have not encountered elsewhere and should be read, along with *Fight for the forest* by Chico Mendes, by anyone who is interested in the struggle going on in Brazil.

BUT WHAT is most interesting is their solution for the Amazon and its forest dwellers. They support the demand of the rubber tappers and rural unions to establish "extractive



THIS land, now degraded and unproductive, was once a lush rainforest.

How Marx became a Marxist

By
Dwayne
Shultz



REVOLUTIONARY workers meet in a cellar in Berlin in 1848.

THERE ARE a number of ideas which are central to the International Socialist Organisation—that socialism has to be the product of worker's struggles from below, that workers will have to smash the state in a revolution, that only international solidarity between the world's working classes can lead to genuine socialism.

These ideas are part of a tradition which has survived amongst socialists in the labour movement since they were first codified by Karl Marx in the 1840s. Marx himself was not some genius who stood outside and above history; his ideas developed over time, and were profoundly influenced by the political events and upheavals of the day.

To understand the origins of Marx's ideas means examining the connections between Marx the individual and the wider social and political movements in which he was involved.

Marx began his political career as a representative of the radical bourgeoisie in the German Rhineland.

The newspaper Marx edited in Germany, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, was financed by wealthy industrialists to promote the cause for liberal reform of the monarchy. Captains of industry such as Camphausen and Meviusen, the banking family Oppenheim, and bourgeois intellectuals like List were major shareholders.

The Rhineland was the most industrially developed part of Germany. It was also the most politically advanced of all the German states. It had been annexed by revolutionary France in 1795 and the ideas of that revolution were a powerful pull on the German middle classes. However the region had been dominated by the Prussian monarchy since the defeat of France in 1815, and after the failed revolution of 1830, a reaction set in against all ideas of reform and liberty.

A turning point came in 1840, when Wilhelm IV assumed the throne. Within three years the *Rheinische Zeitung* had been banned. Liberal academics like Bruno Bauer, an old friend of Marx's, had been dismissed from the universities and Marx himself had been forced into exile.

Marx moves to Paris
MARX'S MOVE to Paris in 1843 was decisive in his political development.

It was here that he was transformed from being a bourgeois leader into a workers' one, from a liberal into a socialist. It was there that he immersed himself in the workers' movement and familiarized himself with its leaders.

When he arrived, there was a thriving socialist movement. All through the 1840s songwriters like Beranger and novelists like George Sand and Cabet were writing popular socialist works. Cabet's novel, *Voyage en Icarie* was immensely popular, and he himself had a following in France which numbered between two and three hundred thousand.

There was an organized workers' party under the leadership of Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc, called the Democratic Socialist Party. Other political activists like Proudhon and Sismondi were publishing important books on economics, sympathetic to the mass of the impoverished workers created by the industrial revolution of the early 1800s.

The French secret police noted how eagerly Marx sought the company of communist artisans in the Barriere du Trone and the rue de Vincennes. In 1844 he wrote wrote,

You would have to attend one of these meetings of the French workers to appreciate the pure freshness, the nobility which bursts forth from these toil worn men. It is among these "barbarians" of our civilized society that history is preparing the practical element for the emancipation of mankind.

It was in Paris also that he studied the French Revolution, and came to appreciate the materialist philosophy of its bourgeois representatives. Engels introduced him to the literature of the industrial worker's movement in England—Chartism—and it was in Paris that Marx first came to terms with English political economy.

Within three months Marx was clearly rejecting many of the ideas he had held in common with his friends back in Germany. In 1844 he published two articles in the *Deutsche Franzosische Jahrbuche*.

One was on the Jewish Question. It defended the right of Jews to practice their religion, and was directed against the elitist and sectarian attitude of Bruno Bauer who dismissed the ability of the mass of the oppressed to transform their own conditions. In the other article on Hegel, Marx referred to the proletariat as the "universal class" and argued for a revolution to overturn the existing society.

Then came an event Marx was to describe as the "Lightning flash from Silesia". Weavers had risen in rebellion. Whilst Marx's old associate, Ruge, dismissed them out of hand, he was enthused by the whole revolt. He defended their courage and organisation and described the workers as the "dynamic element in the German Revolution".

The logic of class struggle
MARX'S sharp intellect was quickly grasping the direction that this new class of proletarians was taking.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, after meeting Engels and familiarizing himself with the works of the English economists, Marx declared that labour, rather than being something to pity, was the pivot around which the entire capitalist economy revolved. The proletariat was therefore potentially the most powerful class and not the weakest.

Like the socialist Robert Owen, he saw the emerging factory system, the way it centralized and collectively organized thousands of workers, as enormously progressive and as the foundation of the new society.

In the struggles of the early proletariat, Marx saw the conditions and a dynamic which compelled the masses of the oppressed to strive towards socialism of their own accord. Socialism was no longer a utopian dream, something to be imposed on history from without, but was given a real foundation from the development of capitalism itself.

It was therefore only after his association with the proletarian movement in Paris that he completely broke from his bourgeois past.

In fact by the time the revolutions of 1848 had swept Europe, the working class was already making itself felt on the wider political scene. As early as 1831 the silk workers of Lyon had risen in rebellion, striking to defend their right to collective bargaining over wages. In 1839, workers' clubs in Paris, under the leadership of Blanqui, had attempted to take power and were crushed by government forces.

There were numerous strikes through the 1830s, and of course the Chartist movement was in full swing in Britain. Chartism was the first mass movement of the workers. Radicals like Julian Harney and Ernest Jones were agitating for workers to take power into their own hands. In 1839 when the first petition was presented to parliament, workers in Newport rose in revolt, and in 1842 the Chartist Convention was endorsing a general strike to bring down the government.

The workers rise
GENERALLY THEN, it was the emergence of the working class as a real historical force—even in as isolated a form as it was in the early 1800s—which set the tone for Marx's view of the world.

By 1848 the proletariat and its organizations were clearly imposing their ideas on the age.

For Marx's companion, Engels, the situation was similar. In 1843 he met the leaders of a German revolutionary organization in London called the League of the Just. It was under the influence of worker revolutionaries like Schapper, Bauer, and Moll, that Engels first concerned himself with questions which particularly affected the workers.

Through a worker in Manchester, James Leech, Engels contacted the leaders of the Chartist movement like Julian Harney, and contributed articles to his newspaper, the *Northern Star*. He also wrote for the *New Moral World*, a paper run by socialists under the influence of Robert Owen.

In 1842 he had sent letters into the paper Marx was editing in the Rhineland. In the *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*, he attacked the En-

glish bourgeoisie and their economists. He sent reports back on the general strike of 1842, and reviewed the political ideas of leading English historians like Carlyle.

His first book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, described in horrifying detail the misery of the industrial proletariat, but it also put the case that such conditions would inevitably create a revolutionary situation.

Later in life, Engels recalled how many of the ideas he and Marx espoused were already "common knowledge" amongst the League which they eventually joined. For example there was a general consensus against "putschism" inside the League after many members had their fingers burned in the disastrous insurrection led by Blanqui in 1839. The leaders of the League who had fled to London were drawn into the mass, organized labour movement which at the time was rallying around Chartism. They therefore understood much more the need for open political agitation and propaganda.

Leaders like Weitling, on the other hand, whose roots were in the communist sects, found it much more difficult to break from the old conspiratorial methods. There was also a sense of the need to combat national chauvinism, and the League itself consisted of German, Swiss, English, Czech, Hungarian and Belgian workers.

So then, it was not that Marx developed his ideas in the absence of the world around him. It was under pressure of historical events that Marx came to the ideas he did.

Marx as critic
IT WAS the notion that workers could themselves transform society from below, which enabled Marx and Engels to produce a devastating critique of other contemporary thinkers.

For example in one of Marx and Engel's first joint works, *The Holy Family*, they spend a great deal of time exposing the elitist conceptions of Bruno Bauer. He described workers as "the dumb mass", an object to be changed by witty philosophers and intellectuals rather than the conscious subject of history. They also criticized sappy liberals like Sue, who proposed that great leaders and heroes would have to lead the masses out of their misery, in novels like *La Mysterie de Paris*.

A good example of the debates Marx had with various working class leaders at this time was the one with Proudhon. In his book, *What is Property?*, Proudhon argued that the most destructive thing about capitalism was that it wiped out the small property holder; the artisan, the peasant, the shopkeeper. Society had to go back to small scale production to prevent the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few. This was summed up in the slogan, "To accumulate wealth is to rob, but to abolish it is to undermine morality."

As a solution, Proudhon proposed the formation of worker's co-operatives and credit societies. He opposed strikes, and argued that struggles to increase wages were pointless since they did not tackle the political system which caused workers to fight in the first place.

Marx had little trouble in demonstrating the reactionary basis of Proudhon's ideas. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, published in 1847, pointing to the National Association of United Trades in Brit-

ain, Marx demonstrated that workers' combinations tended to develop in a political direction, as was the case with the Chartist movement. A point is reached in the struggle against capital where the maintenance of trade unionism in general assumes more importance than wages themselves.

In this struggle, a veritable civil war, all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

Marx correctly identified Proudhon's philosophy with the declining *petit bourgeoisie*, whose small scale property was rapidly being squeezed out by mass production. All such a class could do was bemoan the fact of its inevitable extinction.

Proudhon and other *petit bourgeoisie* theorists simply counterposed ideal utopias to the violence and distress suffered by working people. In theory they rejected the role of the class struggle in bringing about change, as well as the strikes, uprisings and revolutions associated with it.

In place of the imminent terrible wars between the different classes within each nation and between different nations, in place of the real and violent action of the masses by which alone these conflicts can be resolved... M. Proudhon puts the whimsical notion... The solution of actual problems does not lie for him in public action but in the dialectical rotations of his own head.

The workers' potential
MARX, by contrast, sees in the "misery" of the proletariat, not something to pity, but something "subversive which will overthrow the old society."

In strikes and trade union struggle he sees that "the mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself," the means by which it will mount a political attack on bourgeois society as a whole.

It therefore remains for socialists and communists to take note of this struggle and "become its mouthpiece", to turn science away from being doctrinaire, and to make it revolutionary.

Well before Marx and Engels set to work on the *Communist Manifesto* in late 1847, the modern working class movement was already an important factor in European history. Marx's contribution lies in the fact that he was the first to recognize that in its own struggles there lay the embryo of a new way of organizing society.

He did not seek to think up grand utopias, or ideal plans as had been the practice of earlier communists and socialists. They had only represented the class in its infant stages, at a point where the productive forces were insufficiently developed, and the proletariat too weak to pose itself as a real alternative.

The revolutions which swept Europe in 1848 completely vindicated Marx's new perspective. The insurrection in June 1848 of many thousands of workers against the government in Paris, marked the growth of an aggressive and independent working class, determined to defend its own interests against the parties of both the monarchy and the bourgeoisie.

What Marx had asserted theoretically; the failure of the new capitalist order to deliver the goods, and the necessity for workers to organize themselves independently of other classes, was borne out by the force of events.

Behind Victoria's crisis

SUDDENLY it seems the State of Victoria is a disaster. In fact we're told it's an "economic basket case", a national joke, its citizens "numbed" by the State Bank fiasco and "humiliated" by the Labor government's financial woes.

Right wing commentators are having a field day, crowing about the failure of "harebrained Keynesianism". Keynesian theories are simply an approach to fine-tuning capitalist economies, but the implication is that there was something dangerously radical, perhaps "socialistic", about the Cain regime.

Cain's detractors include the federal Labor government, which discovered in the March elections that Victorian voters are deeply hostile to the ALP. A post-election opinion poll showed that the hostility was directed more at the Hawke regime than at Cain, but that only strengthened Paul Keating's resolve to shift the blame for everyone's problems onto the State government. To listen to Keating, you'd think Victoria was the original banana republic.

Yet by any sensible assessment, the Victorian economy is still reasonably strong. Until as recently as July, employment was growing steadily. The unemployment rate was the lowest in the country. Investment was above the national average.

Certainly, there have also been signs of emerging recession. In the June quarter bankruptcies were up 50 per cent over the level a year previously, dwelling construction has been depressed all year, and more recently unemployment has begun to rise sharply.

But much of this is just part of a wider national pattern. For example, Victoria usually has about 20 per cent of Australia's bankruptcies. During that calamitous June quarter Victoria's share was only slightly higher at 23.5 per cent.

The State's industry is facing an artificial recession, brought on by Keating's high interest rates. Keating wants to squish domestic consumption and boost exporting industries. By and large, the exporters who are benefiting are mineral interests. Manufacturing is turning down, and as a manufacturing State Victoria naturally suffers. But you can hardly blame the State government for that.

And yet, Premier John Cain has been forced to quit, and Joan Kimer has presided over a horror budget.

The loan arrangers

VICTORIA does have its own special crisis, arising out of the financial problems facing the government.

It began with the Victorian Economic Development Corporation, which made foolish loans to shady operators. The losses were peanuts compared with what was to come, but they were immensely significant, because the VEDC was a symbol of the Cain government's "Keynesianism".

Cain thought, encouraged by his economic guru Peter Sheehan, that governments could give a lead to industry and capitalists would respond constructively. This was a fatal illusion. Labor handed out money, incompetently, naively, and a motley crew of "entrepreneurs" took the loot and ran.

The pattern was similar to "WA Inc" in Western Australia, except that WA's Burke government was cynical rather than naive.

The VEDC scandal was followed by the collapse of Farrow Corporation's building societies. The Cain government, worried about the VEDC losses and those it knew were on the cards from the State Bank, tried to dodge responsibility for Farrow. But Cain got caught, and ended up with a much bigger bill.

Once again, the main culprits were private capitalists—Bill Farrow and David Clark, owners of the building societies. But by this time the media and the Melbourne establishment had lost confidence in Cain, and they made sure he carried the can.

Then came the State Bank disaster. Seemingly overnight this bank, an historic institution where generations of Victorian schoolkids had deposited their pennies, was gutted and sold off because of losses made by its subsidiary Tricontinental.



TRAMMIES demonstrating earlier this year against the Victorian Labor government's attempt to scrap conductors.

The Trico saga is astonishing. The bank managed to pour funds into every dodgy "hot spot" around. It lent to stock exchange speculators before the 1987 share crash. Then it followed the lemming-like rush of investors into commercial property, finally catching the full brunt of the 1990 property collapse. On its loan books were such reputable gentlemen as Alan Bond, Christopher Skase, and George Herscu.

Ralph Ward-Ambler, appointed earlier this year to sort out the mess, commented wryly: "If you went out to search for people who had a very poor chance of staying in business, it would have been hard to do better."

To listen to John Cain's critics, you'd think he had personally approved all this. But in reality, he followed the advice of the "free enterprise" ideologues and left the State Bank and Trico at arm's length. They made "commercial decisions" in the market place. Rather than use public enterprises to "keep the bastards honest", Cain handed them over to the bastards.

Making the key decisions was Trico managing director Ian Johns (salary and perks: \$420,000). As the Melbourne Herald described him, his role "mirrored that of the aggressive, individualistic businessmen who became Trico's clients." He cultivated "relationship banking" with a growing collection of parasites, and when they went bust the bank went with them. The biggest single blow was when Christopher Skase's television and tourism empire hit the wall.

So the problem is not something socialistic in the policies of the government. If anything Cain can be faulted precisely because he left business to the capitalists, who proceeded to take the "people's bank" to the cleaners.

That is not to say that things would have been all right if the capitalists had been models of propriety. Or that we would have no problems in Victoria if the State Bank had been administered by senior public service bureaucrats.

All sort of honest business people are going broke right now because of the recession. Lots of them have bank loans and overdrafts. The State Bank would be carrying a lot of "non-performing" clients in any case.

And even honest bankers have to compete. In a system that rewards the greedy and unscrupulous, nobody can afford to be a cleanskin. If one bank didn't lend to Alan Bond or George Herscu, someone else would have. Market pressures forced all the banks to follow suit. If public servants had been in charge, they would have been driven down the same path.

Capitalist booms by their nature drive all the players to excesses they later regret. But they

don't regret them half as much as the workers who lose their jobs, and the working class taxpayers who end up footing the bill.

Taking care of business

IN THAT SENSE, what we are seeing in Victoria today is capitalist business as usual. But it must be said that Joan Kimer is taking care of business in pretty ugly fashion.

Despite selling off the State Bank the government remains debt-ridden. In the budget, Joan Kimer announced at least 8000 public service jobs would go. Teachers discovered class sizes would rise and jobs would be slashed, with staff at the Correspondence School to be cut by 50 per cent or more. The State Library announced it would cut out bag handlers. The Victorian Tourist Office was sold to the automobile club RACV.

Kimer promised there wouldn't be public transport cuts, but that promise was undermined a day later, when Transport minister Peter Spyer warned unions services would be cut if they took industrial action in protest at the budget. The unions held back, but cuts were announced anyway.

Spyer announced a "reorganisation" involving fewer country trains, replacing Sunday trains and trams with buses, and less frequent services. Even this wasn't enough for the Age newspaper, which accused him of "shirking the hard options" and demanded he consider shutting down the suburban train system after 8 pm on week days, with no services at all on Sundays.

What was the response of the unions and the Labor left? They seemed to have suffered a political lobotomy.

In August they had mobilised tens of thousands in the streets, and Trades Hall secretary John Halfpenny had demanded that ordinary workers not be made to pay for the government's problems. But when Kimer did just that, Halfpenny said there was nothing the unions could do.

A special State ALP conference on 9 September passed a motion, drafted by Halfpenny, which condemned privatisation and Keating, but carefully spared Joan Kimer from any criticism. This is because Halfpenny and his supporters have no political alternative to what Kimer's doing.

And yet there is real potential for resistance.

Fifty-three staff at the Victorian Tourist Commission occupied the Travel Centre in Collins Street for eight days in protest against the sacking of 12 temporary workers and the sale of their office. They couldn't stop the sale, but they saved the 12 jobs.

On 17 September thousands of secondary teachers voted to ban the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education, Joan Kimer's personal and beloved project, and to hold rolling stoppages. The mass meeting also decided to join a wider strike by all state school teachers on 18 October. Meanwhile 200 students occupied the quadrangle at Ringwood High in support of the teachers.

This kind of militancy could be built on. It is clear that whenever the union officials offer any sort of lead, their members respond with enthusiasm. A widespread industrial campaign, demanding that the rich be made to pay for the crisis of their system, could turn back the Kimer attacks.

Anti-privatisation sentiment inside the ALP has also been strongest in Victoria. Unfortunately the leaders of the trade union and Labor left are more concerned with shoring up Joan Kimer than with leading a fight. Yet this is a pointless exercise if ever there was one.

The odds are that Kimer will be thrown out at the next election whatever she does. If she isn't, it will only be because she has done the bidding of private industry and the political right. In a recent interview with the Financial Review she expressed admiration for BHP boss Brian Loton, and most of all she is desperate to retain the favour of Paul Keating.

"His (favourable) view is based on the fact I was prepared to take the tough decisions", said Kimer.

If that's the only way Kimer can succeed, why prop her up? Yet this now seems to be the official labor left's aim in life.

That is no accident. The official left is deeply implicated in every rotten aspect of the government. Let's consider how they got this way.

Rising to the top

WHILE IN opposition people like Peter Spyer and Education Minister Barry Pullen sometimes championed workers' interests. So did Kimer herself.

Pullen used to be a housing activist. I first encountered Peter Spyer on a factory workers' picket line, and I used to see Joan Kimer on the platform at teachers' strike meetings. In a recent Bulletin interview Kimer nostalgically recalled the old days of "organising meetings and petitions and sitting outside the Minister's office."

But they all had a fatal flaw: their sights were set on winning and holding parliamentary power. This, they believed, was the only realistic way to change society for the better. Votes, rather than protest rallies or strikes, were their strategic orientation. And one day, they won the votes.

So Barry Pullen became Housing Minister, and found himself authorising evictions. Now he is Education Minister, warning teachers that if they strike they will "only hurt the students". Spyer is cutting back the trams. And Joan Kimer told the Bulletin interviewer that she "no longer encourages" people to sit outside Ministers' offices.

This is not just a case of "power corrupts". If people like Pullen, Spyer and Kimer had concentrated their energies on mobilising housing activists and strikers, on building a fighting workers' movement based on rank and file struggles to challenge the capitalist system, that kind of power could have struck blows against corruption as well as many other evils in society.

What is politically corrupting is rising to the top of the existing capitalist power structure. From there, you can only proceed using capitalist methods.

From Joan Kimer to John Halfpenny, the left leaders are locked into the methods of capitalism: cutting services in order to boost profits, hoping to win the confidence of business so that investment flows.

Yet as the last year in Victoria shows, it is this system of investment for profit that leads again and again to crisis. And it's the labour left's worker supporters who are made to pay.

—by Tom O'Lincoln

Should socialists defend dictators?

RICHARD LANE's letter in last month's Socialist (#241) argued that the ISO is wrong to support an Iraqi victory in a war with the US.

Central to his disagreement is a position that socialists cannot support Iraq because Saddam Hussein is a butcher intent on expansion throughout the Middle East, with "...Nasserite dreams of uniting the Arab world under his leadership, and wiping out religious, political and cultural minorities."

What does Richard say about supporting dictators like Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh against the US? I don't know, but the Australian left was very much behind these leaders because they headed genuine anti-imperialist struggles that could weaken the western powers, as happened with the defeat in Vietnam.

It's true that some on the left confused this support for a military victory with uncritical political support for the leaders and their regimes.

Richard rightly wants to avoid uncritical cheerleading for Saddam and Arab nationalism, but he should be just as concerned to avoid putting a small nation like Iraq and western imperialism in the same basket.

Iraq may want to dominate their region, as all capitalist nations do, but it just isn't capable of it. It's a shame Richard hasn't remembered some basic materialism here—rhetoric and bluster are no substitute for vastly superior economic, military and political power.

Under the pretext of defending Kuwait the US has occupied part of the Middle East to discipline a smaller nation and increase US domination. This is the key issue which must be fought.

As in previous anti-imperialist battles socialists desire to see imperialists defeated by weaker nations and therefore politically weakened.

The Socialist

welcomes letters and reports from our readers. Please write to: PO Box A338, Sydney South, NSW 2000.

Letters MUST include a contact address and phone number so that we can verify authorship, and discuss any changes that may be necessary. Letters may be cut for length.

without having illusions in the leadership of the small nation.

We must make clear our political opposition to that leadership, while cheering on their side.

The reason we take sides like this is twofold: Firstly, we hope that other oppressed people will gain confidence in their own battles against similar oppressors. Secondly, anti-imperialist actions can develop into mass struggles and revolution, with the further potential for full-blown workers' revolution.

We can see this process beginning across the Middle East today. Already Saddam's stand in resisting the US's pressure has been welcomed by many sections of the Arab people.

While most Arab rulers have buckled under, ordinary Arabs have enthusiastically demonstrated their support for Iraq. In Syria, one demonstration called for secession of the eastern section of the country to join Iraq. Sections of the PLO support Saddam, as do many freedom fighters in the *intifada* who called on Iraq to attack Israel.

Socialists in the region should fight side-by-side with these forces not stand on the side-lines waiting for another leader with a cleaner, purer image to be forced into a conflict.

Socialists don't welcome the kind of imperi-

alist war that could break out in the Gulf, but we don't hide our heads in the sand either. We need to continue to look for the next step forward in the struggle.

With war-time tension, different opportunities arise for workers and the oppressed to seize. Saddam's resistance to imperialism could inspire the opposite of what Bush and his cohorts wanted—a mass uprising of a people who have suffered under British, French and US imperialism for decades.

Judy McVey, Melbourne

Problems defending JJJ

IWRITE ABOUT the attack on Radio Station JJJ. Like many other government-owned services, the station has undergone "restructuring". This process included the imposition of a hierarchical management structure and culminated in the sudden sacking of six prominent presenters in late August. There had already been staff and budget cuts.

Listeners had noticed a reduction in the progressive content of the station, including critical news and current affairs and even challenging new music. When the DJ's were sacked, hundreds of people protested outside (and inside) the station in Sydney. Some sort of leadership emerged and channelled this anger into a public meeting two weeks later. Here, four thousand people heard management defend their actions. However, no further protest action was proposed. Instead the campaign leadership urged people to maintain their rage whilst management considered a list of demands presented.

The following day, staff at the station passed

some resolutions such as a return to station democracy. Management were forced to make a few concessions. Instead of actively supporting the staff, the listeners campaign has concentrated on letter-writing, petitions and fund-raising. It is now clear that these activities are insufficient to change management's mind.

A campaign of mass demonstrations which support staff demands could place unbearable pressure on the bureaucrats. However, the leadership of the campaign group has argued against such a course. Instead they have opted to enter into a "dialogue" with ABC and JJJ management. This bureaucratic approach is reflected in campaign meetings which are small and of an administrative nature. In fact it appears that an opportunistic clique of aspiring bureaucrats has hijacked a potentially strong movement. Any agreement they reach with management can only be enforced by staff. Instead of talking with the people who created the problems, the campaign must mobilise listeners to support a staff fightback. This is the only action that will bring lasting results.

Adrian Lloyd, Sydney

Hidden history

IDON'T usually read *The Socialist* but I will from now on.

The April issue was the one that really impressed me—especially the article on Gallipoli. I found it very informative and interesting.

You showed that everything I had ever learned about ANZAC Day was a lie. My children are now at school and I would like them to know the truth about ANZAC Day and the whole Australian legend. Could you please send me some information on this subject or refer me to the books used—soon, please while the family is still interested.

Michael Karas, Brisbane

Window dressing

National Agenda for Women, Mid-Term Interim Report on the 1988-92 Five-Year Action Plans, AGPS.

PLENTY OF PEOPLE have heard about Stalin's 5-year plans for the Russian economy. Perhaps not as many people will have heard about the Hawke government's 5-year plans. The National Agenda for Women is one such plan, and has just released its mid-term report.

The report begins with the objectives of the National Agenda for Women. It includes such worthy sentiments as fostering an environment in which women have a fair go "regardless of culture, language, age or family circumstances" and women being free "to make informed choices about the way they wish to live". These are all very admirable platitudes, but unfortunately there's more illusion here than reality.

The Jobs, Education and Training Program

for sole parents, JET, is a perfect example. Since 90% of sole parents are women, JET combines two of the Agenda's main planks: job training or further education, and childcare. The Agenda boasts that JET is about giving women "real choices in their lives and careers". Just looking at the advertising campaign the government used to launch the program will tell you this is rubbish. They had billboards plastered with pictures of women hugging their kids and a caption saying, "Now you can go back to work without ignoring your most important job"—ie motherhood.

At face value the scheme could be seen as a good thing. Sole parents should have access to training for jobs and free childcare. But JET isn't really geared towards that. It's set to get as many sole parents into work and off pensions as possible, thereby saving the government hundreds of millions of dollars.

The vast majority of courses offered under JET are clerical or keyboard courses. Women aren't being given wide choices about what type of job they take. Instead the stereotypes of what women's work is, are reinforced. These courses

meet the demands of the labour market and are a far cry from "giving women real choices in their careers". They are forced to take jobs in the clerical and keyboard areas, because they're the only jobs they can get training for.

There's hardly any extra money given for women on these courses. They get their paltry pensions plus \$30 a week. The Agenda makes no mention of the idea of paying anyone on a training course a full wage while they're learning new skills for a job. So for all of Bob Hawke's crowing about no child living in poverty by 1990, giving people more money, the most obvious solution, is not even mentioned.

Then there's the thousands of childcare places the Agenda raves about. For people on JET, these places are free for the first three months, then they're means tested. One of the most simple ways to free women to make choices about their lives would be to give them free child care. Even the free child care for JET participants comes with strings attached.

Take the example of a Brunswick (Vic) woman with two school-aged children. She

entered a JET course, received clerical training and got her keyboard skills up from 15 to 80 words per minute. She then found a job offering \$24,000 a year. And here's the catch. Her children go to a poor Brunswick Catholic school. Government regulations actually forbid someone being paid to pick her kids up from school and take them to a child care centre—simply because they go to a non-government school.

And, you guessed it, she was forced to turn down the job. So where is all the talk about giving women choices about what they do in their lives?

The National Agenda for Women is full of funding programs which can be supported. For example, it's certainly better that women's health programs exist than if they didn't. But to a large extent, the Agenda is all so much window dressing. As with JET, the government's programs exist more for their propaganda value than anything else. They give the appearance that something is being done while the real problems women face continue.

—by Bernadette Fallon

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With negotiations...

Is Apartheid about to crumble?

By Philip Whitefield

IS APARTHEID about to come tumbling down?

On 2 February this year, State President FW de Klerk unveiled proposals that seemed to many to promise radical political change for South Africa.

It seemed that after decades of resisting the struggles of militant blacks, the deeply racist white state would itself organize a transition to black majority rule.

RELEASE

The release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of political organizations raised the expectations of millions of blacks and opponents of apartheid around the world.

But other events this year have undermined the optimism. Despite the efforts of the ANC to moderate resistance, the white state has lashed out at anti-apartheid activists. But this should come as no surprise. Apartheid is not something grafted on to capitalism. It is a product of capitalism in South Africa and its need for cheap black labour to sustain its profitability.

Both the state and the South African capitalist class are opposed to black majority rule. While sections of liberal capital have for years demanded an easing of state regulation of black

labour and other aspects of apartheid, their demands are for a very limited reform. Capital is worried that black majority rule could be the precursor to an outbreak of working class militancy that might threaten its economic power. And despite the ANC's assurances, they do not have the confidence that they could count on a black-dominated state to defend them.

And so when it comes to the

crunch they do not want to see a collapse of the white state which they have relied on for so long.

The recent violence in the black townships of Johannesburg such as Sebokeng, Thokoza and Kasigo provides evidence of the state's real agenda. The conservative black Inkatha movement, which has a small base in a number of "migrant" worker hostels, is waging a brutal war against ANC/Cosatu supporters. Inkatha clearly has the military support of the police (SAP) as it has intervened directly to prop up Inkatha's declining influence.

Indeed, the SAP have ensured the protection of certain Inkatha hostels using razor wire and it has coordinated attacks with Inkatha on anti-apartheid activists. The hostel rooms in Vosloorus and Watville on the East Rand apparently contain arsenals of AK-47's and sub-machine guns. There is now substantial evidence to prove that Inkatha vigilantes have received military training by the government and Renamo rebels in Mozambique.

At the same time, the state has mobilized a massive military intervention in the townships named "Operation Ironfist." The operation is designed primarily to weaken black community organization under the pretext of neutralizing the violence.

Significantly, during de Klerk's visit to the US, an opportune lull in the violence occurred. The state is able to turn the violence up or down.

And the parallel conflict in Natal continues despite (or because of) the military intervention. Over 5,000 people have been killed as a result of SAP/



NELSON MANDELA: can he negotiate an end to Apartheid?

Inkatha attacks in the two provinces.

The ANC's commitment to negotiations is producing enormous difficulties for the liberation movement. The ANC leadership has issued contradictory statements regarding "Ironfist". At first it was welcomed as "professional" in their conduct. Shortly afterwards, it was condemned as a "licence to kill our people".

To maintain a healthy relationship with the government, it has fudged the issue of state violence in the townships. Nelson Mandela has referred to an ambiguous "third force" (ie dissident police) rather than blame the state directly. According to Mandela it would be easy to "walk out of the talks" and play into the hands of this third force.

However, the issues are extremely clear to the township activists who bear the brunt of the violence. And the local branches of the ANC are being criticised by these activists for

failing to intervene in the crisis. The removal of the police and troops is necessary and should be demanded. And the activists know that they need organized self-defence against Inkatha.

To keep the candle of reform alight, de Klerk has promised to implement a new round of legislative reforms in early 1991. Most probably it will centre on a tinkering with the notorious Group Areas Act.

CLEAR

But de Klerk has already made it clear that "Group" political rights (ie. a white veto over major decisions) will be preserved. As well, reforms can also have a very ambiguous character as the abolition of the Pass Laws in 1986 demonstrated. With this, many blacks without formal citizenship rights became vulnerable under the grotesque Aliens Act.

As on previous occasions, the white government is produc-

ing changes in response to domestic and international pressures. But such reforms can only be a manoeuvre, primarily to allow the South African economy to compete internationally. The European Community and US Government have already signalled that an easing of sanctions is likely. Other countries will no doubt follow when they estimate that de Klerk has reformed apartheid as far as "politically possible".

No doubt the ANC believes that the lever of economic sanctions will be sufficient to finally edge their organization into power. With this, the struggles of workers and community groups become only an adjunct to promote a unified front for negotiations.

The lesson of this year is that, on the contrary, the struggle from below of black workers and community activists is the key to abolishing apartheid—and that will put the question of socialism on the agenda as well



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