

Where to now for anti-war activists?

THE RECENT anti-war movement was the beginnings of such a revolt. Millions around the world marched, picketed, leafleted and struggled for an end to the US-led war.

It was not the movement's fault that the US won.

Bush had the most powerful military in the world. He went to war with a country whose population is smaller than Australia's, with an economy 2% that of the US.

The fact that over 100,000 people in Australia were mobilised against the war is testimony to the basic humanity of ordinary people.

And the enthusiasm, the energy, the creativity of the movement—with its marches, vigils, teach-ins, workplace groups, blockades—even flour bombing the Army Reserve!—proves what socialists have always argued about the possibilities of ordinary people liberating themselves.

Nevertheless, despite a few ongoing activities, that movement has collapsed—as is generally the case when single-issue movements lose their focus.

The question is, what next? What is to happen to the anger, the energy, the radicalism generated by the anti-war movement?

The key to maintaining it is individuals generalising from the issue that got them involved, to see that it is the *system* that is the problem.

The great strength of the anti-Vietnam movement was the thousands who saw the problem as one of imperialism more generally. That broader understanding

sustained their commitment to the struggle through the years it took us to win, and it gave them an ability to withstand setbacks.

Indeed, the growth of the recent movement reflected the degree to which the politics of anti-imperialism had been sustained over 15 years.

THE TRAGEDY is that by and large, the left is unable to take advantage of the anti-war upsurge.

The Labor left, which played an important (if conservative) role over Vietnam, is in disarray. Its parliamentary leaders are indistinguishable from Hawke and Keating as they preach the virtues of hard work, efficiency, welfare cuts and... war in the Gulf.

Because they identified with the regimes of Eastern Europe, most socialists outside the Labor Party were thrown into disarray by the collapse of Stalinism and are now embarrassed to even declare themselves for socialism.

It is a tragedy. Rarely since WWII has capitalism been so clearly a system of economic crisis and war.

Rarely has Labor been more openly a party of the bosses. To cut through the problems you have to reject the idea that socialism was state-controlled industry.

The self-emancipation of the working class has to be restored to the centre of socialist politics.

Far from undermining our politics, the revolutions in Eastern Europe confirmed much of what we had written.

Many on the left *did* finally reject the Stalinist regimes, but also gave up on fundamental social change.

A thorough understanding of Marxism, of theory and the experience of revolutionary struggle, was necessary to sustain a soundly-based optimism about the possibility of getting rid of this rotten system.

Many activists will be discouraged by the end of the anti-war movement and the victory of the US. So the same Marxist ideas are just as central now for those wanting to fight imperialism in the future.

The end of the anti-war movement does not mean the end of resistance to the system.

There are struggles in the workplaces against restructuring, delayed wage rises and sexual harassment. There are people fighting the proposed Third Runway in Sydney and the handing over of forests to the pulp mills.

Socialists not only support such

struggles, but always seek to draw the link between the abuses they are fighting and the capitalist system as a whole. The more widely such an understanding penetrates, the more powerful our resistance will be.

Because the politics of the ISO have always been based on an understanding of how ordinary people can change the world in struggle, we were able to relate the energy the anti-war unleashed.

The same analysis enables us to understand the movement's collapse—and to predict even more explosive struggles in the future.

The ISO today is too small to fill the vacuum on the left, too small to draw large numbers of anti-war activists into our ranks.

But with your involvement, we can build a bigger socialist organisation, one that can have a greater impact on the upsurge next time.

—by Phil Griffiths

NEW PAMPHLET No Blood for Oil Why the US went to war in the Gulf and what we can do now to stop such wars

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The Socialist

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Thanks to: MR \$20; IR \$30; TC \$20.

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