

Writings from the **FRONTLINE**



Selected articles 1991-2008

Jim McIlroy

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Cover photo: Moratorium against the Vietnam War, Melbourne, May 1970.

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Introduction

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” — *Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach (1845)*

This collection of articles from *Green Left Weekly* (now *Green Left*) are by and about myself, as a veteran Australian socialist, and the ongoing fight against capitalism and for radical social change. They span the period 1991 to 2008.

The articles range from reports on events, including accounts of my union work in the federal public sector, as well as socialist election campaigns; stories of overseas adventures; overviews of past political events, including experiences during the anti-Vietnam War movement; some more reflective, theoretical pieces; reviews by myself of several important works; and reviews by others of several of my previous pamphlets on Australian labour movement history.

While the collection is eclectic and varied, it seeks to present an insight into the life and work of one particular socialist activist in the struggle to build a new socialist movement in Australia over many years. It is also in part a companion publication to my book, published in 2021, *A Radical Life: A Memoir by Jim McIlroy*.

Most of the articles here were written by me (or under my pen name Bill Mason). As indicated, a number of pieces are by other writers (reviews, interviews and reports). *Green Left*, Australia's premier socialist newspaper, continues to develop and in 2021 celebrated an amazing 30 years of publication.

Thanks to Dave Holmes for his tireless work in the preparation of this publication. ■



Jim McIlroy (1972).

Food ploughed under while thousands starve

[September 18, 1991; #28]

BRISBANE — I wonder whether those intoxicated by the triumphal hysteria of recent weeks about the “end of Communism” are capable of realising the bitter irony: while Australian farmers being forced to plow their crops under because of low food prices, thousands continue to starve in Third World countries such as Ethiopia.

In the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, a series of reports have appeared outlining the rural crisis and its dramatic consequences.

One, headed “Worthless’ crops destroyed”, began, “Thousands of cases of lettuces are being ploughed into the ground in the Lockyer Valley as the rural recession hits harder than ever.

“Farmers are being forced to plough in crops because they cannot afford to harvest.

“There is a real atmosphere of despair. Farmers are at their wits end’, a leading Lockyer Valley grower, Mr John Bishop, said yesterday [August 8].

“I’ve ploughed in at least 15,000 cases of lettuce. There will be hundreds of thousands of cases chopped in the Lockyer this year.’

“Mr Bill McNeil, a potato and onion grower at Tenthill, believes many producers will have gone to the wall by Christmas.

“I’ve been in this business 37 years and I

have never seen so many potatoes left in the ground and stored on farms.

“We are getting \$6 a bag or \$120 a tonne for our spuds when it costs up to \$250 a tonne to grow them.

“My father used to tell me about the terrible depression in 1932. Now I am seeing it for myself, he said.”

An article in the August 27 edition reports, “Millions of rotting tomatoes litter the ground in the Bowen district because a market disaster has brought one of the country’s top farming districts to its knees.

“More fruit will be wasted than reaches the market this season because growers cannot justify the cost of harvest.

“Thousands of tonnes of tomatoes have been written off, with healthy fruit-laden vines slashed and ripped out of the ground.”

Queensland Farmers Federation president Lyndsay Hall said: “Rural Queensland is bleeding to death, and unless there is a tourniquet applied very soon it is going to become very ugly.

“Farmers are traditionally not militant, but the ripples of anger in the bush are growing”, Hall said.

He blamed the federal government and the banks for ignoring the plight of farmers and letting them go to the wall.

Other reports detail the human tragedy

of farm families being forced off the land by bank foreclosures, often brought on by massive loans at vicious interest rates.

Meanwhile, as Australia’s small farmers are being crushed between soaring bank debt and low prices, we read in the same paper about the desperate plight of thousands starving and dying of disease in war and drought-ravaged Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Courier-Mail writer Susan Hocking describes the horror of mass hunger and illness in the overflowing camps surrounding Addis Ababa, in an article entitled, “They came to bury the baby”.

One camp she visited, formerly Emperor Haile Selassie’s polo field, is now “a sea of tents, filled to overflowing with families ravaged by malaria, relapsing fever — caused by lice infestation — and hunger”.

Hocking explains that aid from Australia is just beginning to trickle into the area, and urges support for the Community Aid Food for Life Appeal.

But what sort of New World Order is it that can allow such absurdities to continue: crops being ploughed under in Australia for lack of a market, while people are dying of starvation in the Third World?

Is this system, capitalism, which brought us the pillage of Africa and Latin America, the Gulf War slaughter and butter mountains and food destruction in the West, the best that human history can create?

It would surely take an extremely depressed and twisted mind to think so. ■

Conference on fighting the New World Order

[December 4, 1991; # 38]

BRISBANE — International and Australian issues facing the left under the New World Order were the focus of a conference at the Resistance Centre in New Farm on the weekend of November 23-24.

The Brisbane Conference of the Democratic Socialist Party attracted some 80 people to a series of feature talks, workshops and other activities on a variety of themes.

Special guest speakers were DSP national secretary Jim Percy and Resistance national coordinator Anne O’Callaghan.

Jim Percy discussed the topic, The DSP,

Alliances and the Social Movements, outlining the history of the DSP’s strategy of combining party-building with the need to reach out to other progressive forces in the left and social movements, as part of the essential process of constructing an alternative political leadership.

A World to Win: Feminism in the ’90s, was the topic of Anne O’Callaghan’s talk, which outlined the achievements, problems and prospects of the women’s movement in a period of challenge to the gains of the past, and the debates emerging about a way forward for women today.

Other talks included Coral Wynter on

Marxism and the New World Order, and DSP Brisbane secretary Jim McIlroy on Australia at the Crossroads: Which Way for the Left?

Workshops were held on issues facing the green movement, international solidarity, trade unions and the ALP, Marxism for beginners and Marxist economics for the “recession we had to have”.

The main themes of the weekend arose from the documents and reports being discussed by DSP members in the lead-up to the party’s 14th National Socialist Activists and Educational Conference, being held near Sydney from January 2 to 6.

A major highlight of the Brisbane conference was the cabaret night, A Cultural Dissent: Mixing Pop and Politics, featuring the Resistance Cabaret and guests. ■

New journal links the international left

[August 24, 1994; # 156]

Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal. No. 2. July-Sept 1994. 128 pp.

If you want to keep a finger on the pulse of the international left and revolutionary movement, you must read *Links*, the new international journal of socialist renewal.

Issue number two maintains the excellent standard of the first edition; it covers many of the key areas of political crisis and struggle in the world today and bridges the too-common gap between theory and practice and commentary and involvement.

As the editorial states: "We introduced ourselves in the first issue as a magazine for the post-Cold War left; a determinedly socialist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist magazine that rejects the Stalinist distortion of the socialist project, a magazine that takes into account ecological, feminist, and anti-racist questions, a magazine that is taking steps to unify and bring together the forces for socialism in the world today, a magazine that aspires to unite Marxists from different political traditions because it discusses openly and constructively".

We can all certainly agree that this is no small undertaking, given the widespread disarray and demoralisation which besets the left in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Nevertheless, even a quick glance at the breadth and diversity of the political currents represented on the *Links* editorial board, and listed as contributing editors, shows the seriousness of this new project. These include: managing editor Peter Boyle and others from the Democratic Socialist Party of Australia; Jeremy Cronin and Langa Zita from the South African Communist Party; Sonny Melencio and Francisco Nemenzo from the Philippines revolutionary left; Boris Kagarlitsky from Russia; Matt McCarten from the NZ NewLabour Party; Carl Bloice, Peter Camejo, Malik Miah and Joanna Misnik from the US Marxist left; Dulce Maria Pereira from the Brazilian Workers Party; Alain Krivine and Ernest Mandel from the Fourth International and many others.

The first article in this issue appropriately highlights the complex challenge now facing the revolutionary movement at the frontline

of the world class struggle today. In "South Africa's transition: A mass-driven transformation", Jeremy Cronin analyses the stormy process leading up to the ANC-led victory in the 1994 elections, and points to the opportunities and problems facing the liberation movement there.

"The very substantial victory of the ANC-led alliance in South Africa at the end of April was an important moment in a complex transition process", Cronin notes. "But it was, clearly, neither the beginning nor the end of that process. Many struggles to overcome the legacy of apartheid and a particularly brutal brand of capitalism still lie ahead. To wage those struggles it is important to understand what has happened over the last four years. This is particularly important for the South African left and democratic forces, because, despite the euphoria of the election victory, there is simultaneously in the ranks of hundreds of thousands of militants a substantial disorientation.

"Our real successes as a liberation movement are obscured by the fact that the way in which they have been won does not square with our traditional Marxist-Leninist (insurrectionary) and national liberation (handing over of power) paradigms. As a result, overstatement of our achievements coexists with considerable scepticism. Unless we analyse analytically and strategically what we have actually done, we are liable not to understand how to carry the struggle forward", Cronin states.

He proceeds to give a comprehensive account of the struggle leading up to the election win, emphasising both the role of mass mobilisation and negotiations with the De Klerk regime in this process.

Cronin concludes: "In the past we tended to conceptualise change as a struggle to capture the commanding heights, as a struggle to nationalise ownership and control. We will be more faithful to the fundamentals of our national liberation and socialist heritage, and more useful to the actual tasks at hand, if we begin to think, as the Reconstruction and Development Program starts to think, of the main task as being a process of democratising power. All

power."

One must admit this formulation of the way ahead raises rather more questions than it answers.

In light of the wave of strikes currently sweeping South Africa, and increasing debate over the direction of the new "government of national unity", we can only look forward to an ongoing discussion of left strategy for this most crucial of international arenas.

In "Winning democracy in Indonesia: new stage for the progressive movement", Max Lane outlines the gradual awakening of a sleeping giant, the democratic and working class forces of Indonesia.

Since the brutal crushing of the Indonesian Communist Party and the entire progressive movement by the Suharto regime in 1965-66, it has been a long, slow haul for democratic rights there.

Lane gives a fascinating account of the rise of a new pro-democracy movement, the role of the youth and students, the increase in strikes and other working-class struggles and the development of different organisations within the democracy movement over recent years.

As the crisis of the Suharto regime deepens, the momentum for democracy is accelerating. Lane provides an insight into the coming confrontation which will bring this dictatorship crashing down.

Nicaraguan Alejandro Bendana's contribution, "The New World Order: neither new, global nor orderly", is a tour de force, a passionate denunciation of the oppression and inhumanity of a world dominated by a handful of wealthy imperialist nations.

Specifically, Bendana argues against any view that the United States has been displaced from its former dominant position in the imperialist pecking order by Japan or Europe in the wake of the end of the Cold War.

Agree or not with all of his arguments, we can only applaud the brilliance of Bendana's case for unity and struggle of the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

Boris Kagarlitsky, an activist in the Russian Party of Labour, provides a scathing account of the neo-liberal project of Yeltsin and Co, arguing that the attempt to drive through capitalist restoration in Russia has had disastrous consequences for the Russian people. "Russia will neither be part of the

The ALP: a prison for the left

Western world, nor a banana republic”, Kagarlitsky says. “[A]ny attempt to force Russia into the framework of the global Western project will sooner or later rebound on those in the West who have fed such illusions.”

For Barbara Einhorn, addressing the question of “Gender and citizenship in East Central Europe”, the upheavals in Eastern Europe have had contradictory effects for women.

While women have generally welcomed the end of the old bureaucratic socialist regimes, they have tended to suffer the brunt of unemployment and new restrictions on the right to abortion.

It will take time for a new feminism to arise to challenge the new status of eastern European women as essentially “home makers”, Einhorn believes.

Tamas Krausz analyses the recent trend to elect ex-Communist, now social-democratic parties to power in some eastern European countries, and the meaning of these new developments.

In a wide-ranging interview, Francisco Nemenzo welcomes the resurgence of the Filipino left which have emerged from recent splits in the Communist Party of the Philippines, and calls for a non-sectarian discussion and united action.

NZ NewLabour Party leader Keith Locke outlines the unique experience of the New Zealand Alliance, in which NewLabour (a left split from the Labour Party), the Greens, the Maori Mana Motuhake party, and others have united to form a powerful, progressive new force in NZ politics, which threatens to beat the official Labour Party in the next national elections.

Finally, Stephen Marks reports on some interesting debates which took place at the special FSLN congress in May in Nicaragua, and considers the prospects for the popular struggle there.

Issue number two of *Links* concludes with a number of lively book reviews and a section entitled “International workers’ movement news”. ■



Lenin: ALP is “a liberal bourgeois party”.

[September 21, 1994; #160]

The Australian Labor Party is a political prison for the left. This is the inescapable conclusion of a century of Labor political history — and especially the last decade or so.

In the previous few issues of *GLW*, a debate has occurred on this crucial issue facing the Australian left — what approach to take to the party which has dominated the leadership of the workers’ movement throughout this century.

The questions have been posed: what attitude should socialists outside the ALP take to the Labor left; and should socialists join the Labor Party and fight for change inside it?

In *GLW* 159, veteran former ALP senator George Georges, who resigned in 1987 in disgust at party betrayals such as the smashing of the Builders Labourers Federation and the ID card, argues for a return by left-wingers to the party and a 10-year program of rebuilding the left of the ALP. Georges has recently rejoined the Queensland branch of the party.

While respecting Georges’ personal record of struggle for progressive causes, I strongly disagree with his view that the ALP is, or can be, a vehicle for socialism or radical change.

Roger Clarke (*GLW* 157 & 159) criticises Max Lane, writing on behalf of the Democratic Socialist Party in *GLW* 154 & 157, for an allegedly sectarian attitude toward rank-and-file left-wing members of the ALP.

Lane writes: “While there are some well-meaning supporters of the left in the ALP,

this does not alter the fact that its main role today is to serve as a cover for the ALP right.”

Clarke’s analysis of the issue entirely misses the main point: what political project are leftists within the ALP pursuing? This has to be answered before the tactical question of how to relate to left-wing ALP branch members.

Part of the problem

The fundamental question is posed by Georges’ call for socialists to “recapture the Labor Party and to re-establish its socialist policies.” This is a utopian dream. The ALP has never been socialist, and has now betrayed even its former principles of social reform.

The ALP is a social-democratic, liberal capitalist party. It is part of the status quo, not of the political alternative.

Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917, observed already in 1913: “The Australian Labor Party does not even call itself a socialist party. Actually it is a liberal bourgeois party, while the so-called Liberals in Australia are really conservatives.”

Bullseye!

And the Labor Party has become a lot more right wing now than it ever was in the early part of the century.

The ALP has a special character among liberal capitalist parties, which is its structural relationship to the bureaucratic leaderships of the ACTU and its affiliates. This distinguishes it somewhat from the US Democratic Party, for example. But politically there is almost no basic difference.

On some issues, the ALP is to the right of the US Democrats. At a time when the Democrat-controlled US Congress has voted to cut military aid to Jakarta, the Australian Labor government has moved to increase it!

Far from Hawke and Keating “hijacking” the ALP, they are the natural leaders of the party, just as Socialist Left ministers Brian Howe and Gerry Hand have been in helping to implement the economic rationalist program of the current government.

Any left strategy based on shoring up the ALP, building a loyal left faction within it, in the final instance defending and strengthening

the Labor Party, is fatally flawed.

The ALP is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Hemmed in

The ALP left is a prisoner of the right. It is not free to act, to publicise its ideas, to organise or mobilise in any way which might eventually threaten the survival of a right-wing Labor government — or even the electoral chances of an ALP opposition.

It must limit itself to factional manoeuvres within the secret confines of Labor organisational bodies. It inevitably finds itself making dirty deals with the right, to maintain this or that position within the party.

What exactly has the left achieved in the past dozen years of federal (or state) Labor government?

And if it did win something, how would we know about it? If any modest gains are made only behind closed doors in factional compromises, what good is that to the larger goal of winning and mobilising the working people to act in their own interests?

It is obvious that the two WA Green senators (and even the Democrats, to a lesser extent) have won more social gains on key issues like the 1993 budget and Mabo than all the ALP left MPs in the country put together.

Not only have they forced concessions from Keating, but they have advanced the cause of social justice by publicly promoting these issues among the people and openly challenging the Labor government — something the ALP left cannot and will not do.

What about rank-and-file ALP members who may be genuine left-wingers or socialists? Clearly, it is essential to encourage any joint work which is aimed at mobilising people to struggle for progressive aims.

Nevertheless, the question must be asked of all members of the left in the ALP: do you believe the Labor Party can be reformed, changed into a vehicle for socialism?

In the final instance, are you seeking to defend the ALP, or are you seeking to replace it with a genuine alternative force for progressive change and socialism?

If your strategy is focused on changing the Labor Party from within, then that strategy is doomed to failure. It is wasting precious human resources on a hopeless project.

Alternatives

So, what alternative strategy is there?

We need look no further than New Zealand for a clue.

NZ Labour Party president Jim Anderton, unable to stomach the New Right policies of the NZ Labour government, led a split to form the NewLabour Party in the late 1980s.

With other left colleagues, Anderton has led a struggle which has completely transformed NZ politics. A major new force has been created with the formation of the Alliance, uniting NewLabour, the Greens, the Maori Party (Mana Motuhake) and the Democrats and the Liberals.

Anderton is now the most popular politician in NZ, and recently the Alliance almost won a by-election in a National Party stronghold, reducing the Labour Party to a 10% rump.

A key part of this development was the internal struggle of Anderton and others inside the Labour Party, keeping true to the issues and refusing to put “party unity” above the interests of working people.

Why hasn't an equivalent struggle occurred inside the ALP?

Partly because social conditions have not worsened as much here, partly because the NZ Labour Party moved even more grotesquely to the right than Labor in Australia, partly because there has been no leadership as resolute as Anderton and Co and partly because the ALP right has been effective in isolating opposition.

With the ALP National Conference coming up in Hobart, there is no sign that the left is prepared to go to the wire to defeat endorsement of privatisation, extension of uranium mining and up-front fees for tertiary study.

Some kind of deal will be done to save face for the left, while adopting the main lines of the neo-liberal policies of Keating and the right.

Almost all the radicalisation and all the social action are outside the ALP at present. To drag young activists back into the Labor Party would be to strangle the new struggles in their infancy.

The role of the ALP left in social movements has invariably been to attempt to buy them off or limit them to lobbying in order not to embarrass Labor governments.

True, as George Georges states, the attempts at a new left party or alliance did not succeed in the 1980s. There is now a gaping vacuum on the progressive side of politics, not filled by the Greens, the Democrats or the socialist parties.

But the clear need for such a progressive “third force” in Australian politics is keenly felt by thousands who are totally disillusioned by the betrayals of the ALP.

Parties such as the Democratic Socialist Party are helping to do the groundwork for a future alliance or coalition of left and green forces which can begin to build a genuine alternative to the ALP. ■

The ALP left: Isolated from socialism

[October 26, 1994; # 164]

Jim McIlroy continues a debate.

Roger Clarke (*GLW* #162) correctly describes isolation from the working class as the key problem facing the socialist movement today. In his article entitled “Isolation from the workers: the real prison for the left”, Roger replies to my contribution, “The ALP: A prison for the left”, (*GLW* #160) in which I argued that a socialist strategy based on rebuilding the left of the Labor Party is a dead end at present.

“The only political party in Australia with any reasonable claim to be connected to the working class is the ALP”, Roger states. Agreed. But this is the central problem of

progressive politics in this country.

The domination of the ALP over the workers' movement is the main reason socialism is a minority force in Australia. It is the major reason why the capitalist offensive against working people has made big gains in the past decade.

The ALP has crushed unions, such as the BLF and the pilots, with the active assistance of the official trade union leadership.

It has used the ALP-ACTU Accord to demobilise the unions while cutting real wages and conditions, raising unemployment to record levels and massively shifting wealth from the poor to the rich.

It has betrayed on the environment, on women's rights, on Aboriginal rights, on privatisation and on student fees.

The federal Labor government is an ally of the brutal military junta in Jakarta, and the world's major apologist for Indonesia's genocide in East Timor.

Most recently, we have the revolting spectacle of Hawke and Keating arguing over who was the biggest warmonger in the Gulf War.

The ALP has been the main political instrument of capitalist restructuring over the past decade, much more so than the Liberals.

The Labor Party is an enemy agent in the midst of the working class.

'For and against'

Yet Roger argues, "The relationship between socialists and the ALP should be both for and against. For the working-class supporters who want the ALP rather than the Liberals to form the government; against the pro-capitalist nature of ALP government."

Of course we should be "for" the working-class supporters of the ALP — just as we should be "for" the interests of workers who voted in huge numbers against the disastrous ALP state governments in Victoria, WA and SA because of the anti-worker policies of those governments.

But in what sense can we speak of socialists being "for" the ALP? We must be resolutely against the ALP politically. Any valid strategy for socialism involves a struggle to break the working class away from the deadly tentacles of the Labor Party.

To get to square one on this, we must be clear on the true nature of the ALP: it is not partly a workers party and partly a capitalist party. It is a "liberal capitalist" party (to quote Lenin), which has the special feature of controlling the workers' movement through its stranglehold on the leadership of the unions.

Its "connection" with the working class is its base in the trade union bureaucracy, not any organic link to rank-and-file workers. If that ever existed to any extent, it has been broken in recent years.

When socialists call for a vote for Labor against the Liberals, it is mainly on the basis that, as a slightly milder form of capitalist rule, the ALP is usually a lesser evil.

It is also necessary to allow experience of



Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

Labor in office to expose the reactionary character of the ALP to working people.

Objective basis

The question of how to break the isolation of socialists from the majority of the working class is a much broader issue. The real problem is that there is a strong objective basis for this relative isolation.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the gains of the international anti-socialist offensive mounted by capitalist ideologues, including the leaders of social democratic parties, have placed a major challenge in the path of socialists.

How to overcome this challenge to socialism is the \$64 question.

It certainly won't be done by going underground in the ALP.

Joining the Labor Party and working to "rebuild" the ALP left, in the current situation in the party and society, would not reduce the isolation of socialists from the workers. It would put the open struggle for socialism and social change even more out of the public arena, and hence separated from the activity and consciousness of working people.

The urgent first priority must be to struggle to raise the profile of socialism in the community, using whatever limited means are available, and to build those movements which directly challenge the capitalist status quo and mobilise working people in their own interests.

This means building openly socialist

organisations like the Democratic Socialist Party and Resistance, which campaign for the active involvement of people around their own struggles — not parliamentarist fix-it solutions from on high.

It means supporting in every way a progressive paper like *Green Left Weekly*, which today plays a unique role in publicising and building people's movements. (It is ironic that this debate on socialism and the ALP can occur only in *GLW*, since there is no public Labor left publication in which to stage it.)

Far from being a short-cut to breaking the isolation of the socialist movement, going into the ALP is a short cut to burying socialism in a maze of internal factional struggles.

This view is not based on grand theory, but on observation of the real state of the Labor left and its actual role right now.

What has the real ALP left — not some future, fanciful one — achieved in the past 15 years or so? Has any section of it led any mass campaign of any kind in the past period?

How would any ordinary worker, not tuned in to the internal machinations of ALP and union leadership feuds, know that the Labor left exists?

Where was it during the Gulf War, the East Timor and Bougainville wars, the federal government's use of penal powers to smash the BLF and the pilots' union, and most of the big campaigns around saving the forests and other environmental issues?

‘Out now; end conscription’: an antiwar activist remembers

Where the ALP left does operate, such as in the student movement around the National Union of Students and the anti-fees campaign, its role is to derail mass mobilisation into lobbying and other actions which won't challenge the ALP federal government. In the women's movement, its role is to head off campaigns for repeal of abortion laws, for example, to avoid embarrassing ALP governments.

Real options

Roger Clarke's scenario of a left split in the ALP linking up with the Greens, the Democrats and the Indigenous Peoples Party would be nice, but is not at all likely for the foreseeable future.

The real options faced by socialists are whether to go back into the ALP, as a desperate, last-ditch stand proposed by George Georges (*GLW* #159) to "rebuild" the socialist left, or to continue with the hard, but essential, struggle to construct a progressive third force in Australian politics.

This option in the immediate term means joining and building organisations like the Democratic Socialist Party and Resistance, which are trying to link up socialist and green forces into a genuine political alternative to Labor.

What Roger Clarke is beginning to dispute is the fundamental strategy of building an independent revolutionary socialist party, separate from the Labor left. Without such an independent socialist party, the socialist project will wither and die.

With the human resources available to the left being so limited at present, precious time and energy are much better spent building the socialist project through Resistance and the DSP than being drawn into the electoralist careerism of the ALP.

For those who do join Labor, it is essential to unite with them in common campaigns on progressive issues so that the reality of the ALP is revealed in the course of struggle.

In this way, the necessity of the socialist alternative will become apparent to wider and wider sections of youth and working people, and socialism will be placed back on the broader political scene in this country. ■

[May 3, 1995; #185]

So Robert McNamara, the architect of the United States war against Vietnam of the 1960s and 1970s, now considers the war a "mistake", and an "unwinnable war." I doubt it. The real problem was that the US and its allies such as Australia did lose the war, in one of the major turning points of the 20th century.

And the imperialist world is still paying a price for the worst defeat suffered by the US in its history. The "Vietnam syndrome", despite a buffeting inflicted on it during the Gulf War of 1991, is still alive and kicking.

The Vietnam syndrome is why the US still cannot intervene in Third World trouble spots with large-scale ground troops if there is even the slightest chance of heavy casualties.

As soon as those body bags started arriving home any US presidential administration would be in deep strife.

Despite collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberation of Saigon 20 years ago remains a spectre hanging over the future of the New World Order.

The fact that the Vietnamese people, poorly armed but determined to defend their national independence against the greatest and most ruthless war machine in history, were able to triumph in the end, at immense human cost, remains an inspiration to oppressed peoples of the Third World everywhere.

In 1965, when Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared Australia would send troops to support the US military invasion of Vietnam, I joined many students in opposing the war.

We were a small minority at that time, even among university students. One of the myths generated about the 1960s is that it just was a period of youth radicalisation.

In reality, like any other period of history, the antiwar movement was fought for over a long period of time. The more general radicalisation of youth which strongly characterised the 1960s and early 1970s developed through struggle, just as much as being a product of general social conditions.

At that time, I was studying arts at

Melbourne University, involved in all the usual associated aspects of student life like late night parties, extensive red wine consumption, hangovers, film festivals etc.

Then conscription hit the country like a bombshell.

I remember rolling into the MU Cafeteria at a late morning hour, a little the worse for wear, in early 1966, meeting a group of my fellow 20-year-old males, only to realise that almost all of us had won the Lottery of Death — our birthday marbles had come out of the barrel, and we were conscripted to go to Vietnam.

In the early ballots, a high percentage of birthdays were chosen. We all decided then and there that we weren't going to fight a war against the Vietnamese people.

Remarkably, none of us did go in the end. I took the classical path for students of managing to stay at uni for some seven years, by one means or another.

I remember many adverts on the uni library noticeboard along the lines of, "Engineering student urgently needs marriage partner. Please contact X."

Others left the country; feigned insanity; went underground or whatever, until conscription finally ended in 1972. But conscription focused our minds very effectively on the slaughter in Vietnam, and the need to end it as soon as possible.

It was a bitter struggle from the very start. And the antiwar forces were quite isolated in the early days. I remember countless teach-ins, meetings, debates, gradually developing into pickets, marches and demonstrations, quite moderate in size at first.

We fought out the ideological battle very fiercely in those days, confronting the right-wing forces of the National Civic Council and the Democratic Labor Party, over the issue of the "threat from the north", the infamous Gulf of Tonkin incident, the CIA's White Paper on alleged Communist North Vietnamese takeover of "democratic South Vietnam".

The domino theory (that Asian countries would fall to Communism like dominoes once Vietnam was lost) was a major issue of debate. As our radicalism developed, we

began to hope it was true.

In those days, I was a member of the Labor Party.

I also joined the Fabian Society (not a fan club for the singer, but a group linked to the British Social-Democratic organisation of the same name).

In 1966, we campaigned tirelessly for the ALP under Arthur Calwell's leadership. It was one of the most disastrous defeats Labor ever suffered at the hands of the Coalition, but it was also one of the most politically principled campaigns in ALP history.

Calwell came out for withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam and an end to conscription.

The election was bitterly contested, with the DLP putting up terrifying adverts with marching Communist jackboots and the stain of the Red Menace flowing south from China to Vietnam, to Indonesia and thence to a cowering Australia.

It was vicious, lying propaganda, but undoubtedly effective. It scared the Australian electorate into giving Harold Holt a huge mandate.

I remember our immediate revenge on the Country Party supporters at MU Queens College, where I was staying at the time, was to drunkenly sing "The Red Flag" late on election night to keep the faithful from their sleep.

At the end of 1966, US President Lyndon Johnson toured Australia. It was a turning point in the antiwar struggle. His motorcade was to drive past Melbourne Uni on the last day of the campus year, for heaven's sake!

Thousands of tired and emotional students poured out of the pubs next to uni, only to be enraged to find that the president's route had been changed.

They raced to the city centre and confronted the motorcade. That was the day two students made world headlines by throwing red and green paint (the NLF colours) on Johnson's limousine, demonstrating to an international audience that the Australian antiwar movement was strong and growing.

I later joined the MU Labour Club and the Democratic Socialist Club, and became more involved in the organisational side of the antiwar movement and the growing student rights movement.

We began to question not only the war, but all aspects of a repressive, corporate-dominated society, which waged war against



Melbourne Moratorium, May 1970.

Third World peoples abroad and exploited and oppressed its own people at home.

Universities were seen as institutions for the training of a new, technological working class, and for the maintenance of ideological conformity with the needs of the ruling class.

We began to press for student-worker control of universities; high school students began to organise against the war and for student rights; and the new women's liberation movement burst onto the scene. The radicalisation of the movement accelerated.

Annual July 4 marches on the US Consulate in Melbourne were initiated by the Maoist Worker Student Alliance, which became quite strong at Monash University and later Latrobe.

1968 was a crucial year, internationally and in Australia. First, the Tet offensive in Vietnam showed graphically to the world that the National Liberation Front would not be defeated, and that the US-led war was doomed.

Second, May-June '68 France showed the revolutionary potential of the student-worker alliance, and that a socialist revolution was possible (although very difficult to achieve) in an advanced capitalist country.

Third, the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia showed that democratic socialism could be a reality, but the Soviet invasion dashed our immediate hopes for an end to Stalinist rule in the socialist bloc.

Finally, we had our own student revolt in 1968 with the Monash Soviet, in which students occupied the campus in the face of heavy police pressure, over campus and antiwar issues.

All these events gave a tremendous new impetus to the antiwar movement in Australia.

Antiwar sentiment gradually widened to more and more sectors of society. Unions became involved, with the famous Seamen's Union banning of the Boonaroo, a ship bound for Vietnam with war supplies.

A major escalation of the industrial class struggle was the jailing of Tramways Union leader Clarrie O'Shea in 1969, and the general strike which followed. I'll never forget the horror and fear on the faces of the good burghers of Melbourne as they walked out of Myer's in Bourke Street, to see thousands of industrial workers marching to the Industrial Court to demand O'Shea's release and the abolition of the industrial penal powers.

I remember thinking to myself, "We must link up the workers' movement and the



Saigon presidential palace 1975.

antiwar movement to really give this system a shake-up!"

The movement had to fight for every inch of ground, including the basic democratic right to march, picket and demonstrate in public.

The By-Law 418 campaign I well remember, as many people were arrested for merely handing out leaflets on the steps of the Post Office. The law was eventually repealed.

By this stage, I was pretty well a convinced Marxist, and an ardent reader of *New Left Review* and other radical publications.

But I still didn't see the organisational way forward, and remained within the ALP and student movement framework.

The antiwar movement was now a gigantic force, but even we activists didn't realise just how big. Preparations for the first Vietnam Moratorium of May 1970 were growing apace. The movement was now very broad, with local committees and suburban protest actions breaking out all over.

At this time, ALP leaders in Victoria played an important role — contrast their pro-war position on the Gulf War, East Timor, etc, today!

Jim Cairns was the central figure in the Moratorium campaign. But the movement was a unique coalition of the entire left and progressive movement, from the radical left, to the Communist Party, to the churches and various liberal organisations.

There were many debates on strategy and tactics, over mass action versus small-group direct action, over demands, such as "Troops Out Now!" versus "Negotiations Now!"

But it was a period of great ferment of ideas, and a tremendous movement of people's power.

Back on campus, one of the most

enjoyable activities the students got up to was to form a Liberal and Country Party Club. This infuriated the Liberals, but there was nothing they could do about it because the club was properly affiliated to the MU Students' Union.

The constitution of the MULCP was to oppose the war and specifically to raise funds for the NLF! It was a joy to behold to see the MULCP banner at every antiwar march, and to see stalls in the union at lunchtime collecting donations for the Vietnamese freedom-fighters — which was illegal under federal law.

Finally, the eve of the great day of the first Moratorium arrived and a huge debate took place in the Union: "Should the university close down for the Moratorium?"

I knew we would win the struggle when the vote was taken, overwhelmingly in favour of a total shutdown. It was a feeling of immense elation as prominent pro-war right-winger Dr Frank Knopfelmacher stormed out of the hall cursing us as Communist dupes.

On the morning of the Moratorium, hopes were high, but even the activists were stunned at the crowd which filled the entire centre of Melbourne, bringing the city to a standstill. More than 100,000 people marched to stop the war, coming from every age group and walk of life.

The government had accused marchers of being "bikies pack-raping democracy", and one elderly grandmother replied by carrying a placard, "I'm a pack-raping bikie!"

The stunning success of the first Moratorium in Melbourne and other cities marked the beginning of the end of Australia's intervention in Vietnam.

Shortly after this, realising the need to extend the antiwar struggle to a revolutionary struggle for socialism, as the

only permanent answer to war and inhumanity, I joined the Socialist Youth Alliance (now Resistance).

We campaigned within the antiwar movement for a continuation and extension of a mass-action strategy, until all troops were out and conscription ended once and for all.

Moratoriums were held, in September 1970, and June 1971, both huge mobilisations as well. The Liberal government was on the run, both with its war policy and for its own survival.

At the beginning of 1972, I became a founding member of the Socialist Workers League (later the Socialist Workers Party, now the Democratic Socialist Party.)

We continued to play an important role within the antiwar movement, which continued to operate on a lesser scale after the election of the Whitlam Labor government in December 1972. Whitlam withdrew all remaining Australian troops from Vietnam and ended conscription, an immensely popular move.

After the election of Labor on a wave of public demands for change after 23 years of Liberal-Country Party reaction, a new era in Australian politics was opened up, with new challenges for the left.

Nevertheless, we continued to organise antiwar protests against US policy, until the famous day when NLF troops entered Saigon and the US puppet regime finally collapsed.

The scenes on TV of US helicopters being tipped over the sides of aircraft carriers, because there wasn't time to send them back for a second load of panic-stricken US personnel and South Vietnamese supporters of the old regime was a cause of incredible excitement throughout the world.

We felt that we had played some modest part in this great victory. We understood that US and Australian imperialism had suffered a major blow, and that the national liberation movements of the Third World would be inspired to greater efforts by this victory.

Today, looking back at the 20 years since then, I still believe that, with all the recent setbacks to the world revolutionary movement, the example of Vietnam remains a beacon for the peoples of the world struggling to achieve their freedom and national self-determination. ■

DSS bans over system failure

[August 2, 1995; #196]

BRISBANE — Union members at Department of Social Security offices and teleservice centres around the country have launched a campaign of bans and reduced public contact hours over the past several weeks in protest at computer system failures, which have caused major disruption to the public and extra workload and stress to DSS staff.

Community and Public Sector Union members in DSS voted nationally to limit public contact hours to between 10am and 3pm, allowing extra time away from the counter to attempt to process huge backlogs

of benefit applications and other work.

Anger at the computer failures which accompanied the department's attempt to introduce the new parenting allowance — a major change in the social security benefit structure — was heightened by DSS management's reassurances following a similar crisis last September, when the partner allowance system changes were introduced.

Behind the crisis is an attempt by the federal government to cut back the public sector, reduce expenditure on computer system infrastructure by contracting out work and operate public services on the

cheap.

Social Security staff are fed up with being forced to carry the can for government and department failures.

CPSU members voted overwhelmingly on July 21 to maintain the campaign of bans and workload reduction measures until a satisfactory resolution of the current problems is achieved, and called for an agreement with the department for close union involvement in planning and implementing future major system changes.

After DSS management took the dispute to the Industrial Relations Commission, union members were to meet on July 31 to consider an IRC recommendation to remove bans on public contact from 8.30am to 10am "as a sign of good faith and to facilitate urgent negotiations". ■

Brisbane CPSU members debate response

[May 8, 1996; #230]

BRISBANE — A mass meeting of CPSU members here on April 30 discussed the Howard government's attack on the federal public service and began to plan an industrial response.

The meeting in the Brisbane City Hall heard union state secretary Claire Moore report on the severity of the government's cuts to jobs, and other measures. Assistant secretary Phil Statham then moved the National Executive resolution for a report to members by May 7.

Department of Social Security delegate

Jim McIlroy spoke against the motion, foreshadowing a resolution for "a resolute CPSU response to the government attack on the Commonwealth Public Service".

McIlroy stressed the "enormous challenge" to the union represented by the Howard government's attack.

He said that the cuts were already occurring, not just proposed, and that "we can't afford to wait any longer to begin strong action".

He urged support for the alternative resolution, which proposed a "Defend Public Services" campaign; the immediate

launching of an industrial campaign, including a 24-hour general stoppage by CPSU members; and a series of rolling bans, stoppages by key sectors, establishment of a strike fund, picket lines and public rallies.

"We need to give the government a clear message that we won't be rolled over, right now", McIlroy concluded.

The alternative motion was seconded by DSS delegate Mark Cronin.

After debate, the National Executive resolution was carried overwhelmingly. Nevertheless, as Phil Statham recognised in his right of reply, the proposals in the alternative motion deserved support in the future.

An additional resolution was carried calling for further mass meetings to consider a 24-hour strike by May 24. ■

Science versus capitalism

[December 10, 1997; #301]

By Jim McIlroy & Robyn Marshall

The ideologists of contemporary capitalism claim that the fall of communism was significantly contributed to by the west's superiority on the science and technology front. Star Wars military technology, they said, succeeded in "breaking" the Soviet Union under the impact of an accelerating technology gap.

The apparent miracle of recent scientific breakthroughs in a variety of fields, including genetics and related medical areas,

is said to be living proof of the dynamic creativity of the "free market."

No one can doubt the immense potential represented by modern science and technology to solve a host of problems and dilemmas facing humanity today. However, contrary to appearances, science faces a growing crisis as the capitalist system enters its geriatric phase.

Late capitalism, faced with repeated market collapses and a long-term squeeze on profitability, can no longer so easily afford investments in "pure research", which do

not produce a rapid return on capital.

Capitalism, which Marx and Engels praised 150 years ago for launching the modern scientific revolution, is today becoming a straitjacket on the further development of science and technology.

As Marx predicted then, "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society [including science and technology] come into conflict with the existing relations of production [private ownership of industry] ... From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters."

Today, a social system based on private property increasingly contradicts the need

of science and technology for more socialised and cooperative goals and methods of operation. And ironically, in the long run, the capitalists' attack on science undermines the economic and social viability of their own system!

In Australia, the crisis of science is becoming especially acute because of cutbacks imposed by the Howard government in its blind search for a balanced budget.

For example, the process of awarding research grants by the government's major funding body, the National Health and Medical Research Council, was thrown into chaos this year by federal cabinet's decision to sack half the members of the council to save money!

As well, the slashing of funding to higher education has decimated the resources available to employ research scientists. Researchers are told they must hunt for support from the private sector, yet

internationally Australia is sixth last in the dollars business allocates to research and development. While Australia has a relatively small population, Finland, for instance, has almost double the R&D investment that Australia does!

Research scientists have to scramble desperately for grants, preparing numerous applications, most with great potential, but often unsuccessful due to funding shortages. They may have to spend a substantial proportion of their time, while pursuing one project, preparing submissions for their next grant, because funding periods may only last a year or two.

Funding scientific research according to the whims of the market is an irrational waste of resources. It leads to a loss of skills and human effort, especially young would-be scientists who are discouraged from entering or continuing in science. According to the current priorities of the system, they are better off studying business

management or law.

Recently, the University of Queensland dissolved its School of Physics and Department of Electrical Engineering into broader areas. Apparently, these fundamental disciplines are no longer essential to a scientific education system.

In short, long-term scientific progress and capitalism are no longer compatible. This is one more reason why we need a fundamental change: to a socialist system, in which science, conducted under socially progressive guidelines and aiming to explore every sphere of the human and natural world, would be accorded a top priority.

Only when the commercial shackles are lifted off modern science and technology will the critical problems and questions of our time be able to be solved by the freest application of cooperative human creativity. ■

Can the working class make a revolution?

[April 8, 1998; #313]

One of the central tenets of the Communist Manifesto states: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class". This fundamental proposition of Marx and Engels is now under serious challenge.

Virtually all pro-capitalist commentators allege that the contemporary working class, particularly in the developed countries, has been permanently integrated into the capitalist system.

There has been no successful socialist revolution in an advanced capitalist country in the century and a half since the Manifesto. The working class does not even remotely look like seizing power anywhere in the west right now. There has been nothing resembling a pre-revolutionary crisis in the imperialist world since the May-June 1968 student-worker revolt in France.

After the collapse of "communism" in the eastern bloc, conservative commentators have declared the socialist option closed. On top of this, it has been claimed that even when revolutions have occurred in the 20th

century — e.g., Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba — the working class has not been the primary revolutionary factor. Rather, it is argued, these revolutions were carried out by predominantly peasant-based forces.

This apparent tendency led some progressive theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse and Frantz Fanon in the 1960s, to declare that the western working class had indeed been integrated into capitalist society, and that, in future, the revolutionary mantle would have to be taken up by "out" groups, such as students and the unemployed in the west, and the peasantry in the Third World.

Despite all this, it is much too early to write off the revolutionary potential of the workers. For a start, the last 150 years have been a period of the most intense struggle between the working class and the capitalist class. There have been numerous confrontations involving millions of workers in fierce battles with the employing class.

Nevertheless, the question remains: is the working class willing and able to fight only for protection of jobs and living standards within capitalist society, but not for the revolutionary overthrow of that system?

History refutes this proposition. Lenin

described the 20th century as a "period of wars and revolutions". Only the most short-sighted pundit could ignore the real history of our time: the last 150 years have been a tumultuous period of wars, revolutionary upheavals and social and industrial turmoil on an unprecedented scale.

These struggles have not been over merely immediate issues and conditions, but repeatedly over questions that determine which class will rule — from the 1848 revolutions in Europe, to the Paris Commune of 1870, to the upheavals of the 1920s, the crises of the 1930s and 1940s, the colonial revolutions of the 1950s, '60s and '70s, and the youth revolt of the 1960s and '70s.

On "peasant revolutions" allegedly displacing the working class, closer analysis shows this to be a serious distortion of reality. For example, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was carried out by the working class, with the support of the bulk of the peasantry. The Russian working class was then a small minority of the overall population, but it was the key political and social force in the class struggle, both against the tsarism and against the succeeding capitalist regime.

The Russian working class was the most powerful, politically advanced and best organised in the world at that time. The key factor was that it had the best and most

battle-hardened revolutionary leadership in history: the Bolshevik Party.

In Russia, as Lenin predicted, the “imperialist chain” broke at its “weakest link”. But it didn’t break of its own accord; it was broken by a conscious revolutionary struggle, led by a Marxist-Leninist party, which wrested the leadership of the working class from reformist forces.

Lenin explained in his 1902 work, *What Is To Be Done?*: “We have said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic [revolutionary socialist] consciousness among the workers. It could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation etc.

“The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals ...

“In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy [revolutionary Marxism] arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement, it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia ...”

Following from this, the question of consciously building a capable revolutionary leadership, with a strong base among the workers, is the key factor in realising the revolutionary potential of the working class.

Without this leadership, revolutionary crises can arise and be lost, as has happened many times in this century. Without the development of a revolutionary leadership, the working class cannot spontaneously develop the revolutionary consciousness necessary to move outside a trade-unionist perspective, no matter how intense the attacks by the ruling class or how fierce the battles to defend living conditions and democratic rights.

Why is the working class the “only truly revolutionary class”? Because, as the *Communist Manifesto* puts it, alone of all the classes under capitalism, “the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”



Paris, May 29, 1968.

Structurally, the working class, which alone creates surplus value, has the power and ability to overthrow capitalism and create a new society based on socialised ownership of the major means of production.

The *Communist Manifesto* explains, “The development of modern industry cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers.”

Moreover, “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.”

What is the nature of this “immense majority” of capitalist society? It is not only the industrial working class, as the popular misconception has it. The proletariat are those who own no capital, who “have nothing to sell but their labour power”. (Those workers in possession of a house or even a few shares in Telstra or BHP are not capitalists — whatever they may think themselves!)

In his pamphlet *Workers Under Neo-Capitalism*, published following the student-worker revolt in France, Marxist economist Ernest Mandel noted the sociological changes in the working class under late

capitalism.

These tendencies include: “Growing integration of intellectual labour into the productive process; growing standardisation, uniformity and mechanisation of intellectual labour; growing transformation of university graduates from independent professionals and capitalist entrepreneurs into salary earners appearing in a specialised labour market — the market for skilled intellectual labour where supply and demand make salaries fluctuate as they did on the manual labour market before unionisation ... What do these trends mean but the growing proletarianisation of intellectual labour, its tendency to become part and parcel of the working class ...

“Neo-capitalism in the long run strengthens the working class as did laissez-faire capitalism or monopoly capitalism in its first stage.

“Historically, it makes the working class grow both numerically, and in respect to its vital role in the economy. It thereby strengthens the latent power of the working class and underlines its potential capacity to overthrow capitalism and to reconstruct society on the basis of its own socialist ideal.”

In short, modern capitalism has increased the revolutionary potential of the working class: the problem is how to realise that potential.

The modern working class in “normal times” is not a static phenomenon, but a changing series of overlapping categories, which interact, compete to varying degrees and engender different layers of

consciousness: employed and unemployed, organised in unions and unorganised, skilled and unskilled, males and females, “locals” and migrants.

The ruling class uses this differentiation to bolster its divide-and-rule strategy. The Manifesto notes the shifting dialectic of the national and international class struggle: “Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie.”

Nevertheless, in the final instance, “The working people have no country ... united action ... is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.”

The working class has developed on a world scale, and the revolutionary centre of the class struggle is always shifting. Marx and Engels noted the shift of centre from England to Germany and France in the latter 19th century. Engels glimpsed the possibility of the revolutionary role of the Russian working class. More recently, we have seen changes in the structure of capitalism internationally, with the rise of the so-called tiger economies, primarily of Asia.

The current collapse of the Asian tigers foreshadows massive working-class struggles in countries like South Korea and Indonesia, where the development of a new working class has fundamentally strengthened the revolutionary potential of working people in that region — and on a world scale.

On the other hand, changes in the international structure of capitalism since the Manifesto have created new barriers to the realisation of the workers’ revolutionary role. Imperialism, the product of monopoly capitalism, created the objective conditions for the development of opportunism (or reformism/Labourism) as a predominant force in the workers’ movement of the advanced capitalist countries.

A resolution adopted by the founding Congress of the Third International in 1919 explained: “The general course of economic development had given the bourgeoisie in the wealthiest countries the opportunity to tempt and buy off the upper layers of the working class — the labour aristocracy — with crumbs from its enormous profits. The petit-bourgeois ‘camp followers’ of socialism swelled the ranks of the official

Social-Democratic [or Labour] parties and gradually altered their politics in a bourgeois direction.

“From the leaders of the peaceable labour movement, the heads of the trade unions, the secretaries, the editors and officials of Social Democracy there developed a caste — a labour bureaucracy with its own selfish interests, essentially hostile to socialism.”

This labour aristocracy provided the social basis for the development and continuation of reformist parties such as the ALP, which have generally maintained an iron grip on the political leadership of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries ever since.

As the Russian Bolshevik leader Gregori Zinoviev noted in his 1916 work, *The Social Roots of Opportunism*, the Australian Labor Party was a prime example of this phenomenon:

“The reactionary role of the ‘socialist bureaucracy’ appears nowhere so ostentatiously as in Australia, that veritable promised land of social reformism. The first ‘Labour ministry’ in Australia was formed in Queensland in 1899. And ever since then the Australian labour movement has been a constant prey of leaders on the make for careers.

“Upon the backs of the labouring masses there arise, one after another, little bands of aristocrats of labour, from the midst of which the future labour ministers spring forth, ready to do loyal service to the bourgeoisie.”

Nothing much has changed in 80 years on this front! And the political control exercised by the Labor leaders over the Australian working-class movement is the key obstacle to the development of a revolutionary consciousness among the workers in this country still today.

How can this reformist control be overcome? What conditions are necessary to turn the revolutionary potential of the working class into actuality?

Industrial militancy occurs on a cyclical basis in all countries — e.g., most recently, French workers over public service cuts in 1995 and French truck drivers in 1997; the crucial United Parcel Service strike in the US in 1997; the regular militant struggles of South Korean workers; the August 19, 1996, workers’ demonstration in Canberra against anti-union laws.

This militancy will grow stronger in

response to the deepening capitalist economic crisis, sparked by the Asian economic meltdown, and the consequent escalating attacks by the ruling classes in every country. However, sporadic militancy which occurs as a regular part of the industrial struggle must be organised into a force — a “class struggle left wing”.

An example of this would be the Militant Minority Movement of the 1930s in this country, which led workers and unemployed campaigns during the Great Depression.

The lessons of previous struggles must be retained and fully learned from, and a new leadership, steeled in battle, developed. This need highlights the role of revolutionary, as distinct from militant, trade union organisation.

Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?*: “Social Democracy [in this case revolutionary socialism] leads the struggle of the working class not only for better terms for the sale of labour power, but also for the abolition of the social system which compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich”.

This involves the broadest political struggle, on all levels, international and local: “Working class consciousness cannot be genuinely political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases, without exception, of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected”.

Revolutionary consciousness and trade union consciousness are interrelated, but can be counterposed at crucial times. There is nothing eternal about the trade union struggle. But in most western countries, and in Australia, the primacy of union struggle in the initial instance has been handed down to us by our history.

The challenge facing Australian workers is, in a period of intense attack on basic trade union and democratic rights, to defend and extend the unions — and at the same time to prepare the ground for raising the struggle to a new, more advanced level.

This new stage involves directly taking on the class rule of the capitalists, refusing them the right to exploit our labour power at will. It means, in the end, taking the power out of their hands, and establishing a new, socialist society based on common ownership and control of production, and a just and humane social order. ■

What's behind the rise of One Nation?

[June 3, 1998; #320]

BRISBANE — The growth of the racist One Nation party, behind figurehead MP Pauline Hanson, is a result of the capitalist economic crisis, which has pitched workers into unemployment and poverty, ruined small businesses and driven family farmers off their land in droves.

It is part of the rise of far-right organisations in the US, France, Germany, Britain and other countries of the advanced capitalist world as the neo-liberal offensive cuts deeply into living standards and democratic rights internationally.

With polls showing support for One Nation running at 14% statewide in the Queensland election, and at up to 25% in some depressed rural areas, the debate over One Nation has virtually taken over the entire major party campaign.

The furore over the state Coalition's decision to allocate preferences to One Nation over Labor has served to emphasise that these parties and Hanson's racist organisation are part of a single far-right bloc, which seeks to turn back the clock on any progressive gains made by Aboriginal people, migrants, women and workers over the past few decades.

This opportunist ploy by the Queensland Libs and Nats, aimed at winning the Queensland election by any means necessary, may come back to haunt the Coalition in future.

As some sections of the Liberal, National and business sector have pointed out, Hanson's anti-Asian, isolationist stance could have serious implications for Australian big business trade and political relations with the countries of our region in coming years.

Former Liberal PM Malcolm Fraser protested on May 28 that the Coalition parties had done Australia "a great disservice" by legitimising One Nation, which he said had promoted the "evil scourge" of racism.

Other conservative politicians and former MPs have backed Fraser, nervous about a possible ethnic voter backlash against the Coalition in the marginal suburban electorates of Sydney and Melbourne, especially, in the upcoming federal poll.



One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, Toowoomba, 1998.

Support for One Nation, while initially founded on anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian immigrant racism alone, has now been broadened somewhat by the astute strategy of Hanson's political advisers — which is to capitalise on the deep disillusionment of a large section of the population with the "economic rationalist" policies of the major parties, and with parliamentary corruption in general.

Certainly, One Nation has tapped into the reactionary rural base in Queensland of former National Party premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, even siphoning off sections of the National Party membership itself in some country areas.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that that former Liberal Hanson got her own start as an "independent" MP by winning the former ALP urban stronghold of Ipswich.

The immediate result of the Coalition preference deal with One Nation is to threaten several Labor-held marginal seats on the Queensland coast, such as Hervey Bay, with a semi-rural and high unemployment population, vulnerable to Hanson's vicious lies about "Asians taking our jobs", and "lazy blacks living off our taxes".

One Nation's simplistic far-right program calls for open extinguishment of native title; abolition of an Aboriginal affairs portfolio; an end to all affirmative action programs;

an end to Asian migration; reintroduction of capital punishment; even more prisons; mandatory so-called "truth in sentencing"; police-enforced curfews on youth; and reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools.

Together with populist opposition to foreign imports and support for tariffs, and condemnation of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, this brew of reactionary nostrums has a powerful appeal to many people faced with gloomy economic prospects — in the absence of a strong progressive alternative with enough influence and resources to reach out to the depressed sections of our society and offer them an anti-capitalist solution in the interests of working people.

This is why the Democratic Socialists are calling for the construction of a fighting opposition to One Nation — and to the neo-liberal two-party system which feeds the growth of this far-right monster.

Now, in the face of this threat to our political and social gains, is the time to relaunch the project of a broad-based, genuinely progressive opposition, relying primarily on mass action rather than parliament, to halt this deepening rightward offensive in its tracks. ■

Jean Devanny: pioneer Marxist feminist

[January 26, 2000; #390]

Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary by Carole Ferrier (Melbourne University Press, 1999, 393pp).

Jean Devanny was a leading figure in the Australian left in the 1930s and 1940s. She was an author, Communist orator and women's liberationist. Carole Ferrier has produced an excellent biography, after 20 years of study and research, of one of the important pioneers of Marxist feminism in this country.

Born in the south island of New Zealand in 1894, Devanny was raised in a small mining town. Early on she began to support the struggle against class exploitation and to resist the restrictions placed on women. She had the distinction of having her first novel, *The Butcher Shop*, banned by the NZ government on the grounds of obscenity.

Married to a miner, Hal Devanny, Jean Devanny and her family moved to Australia in 1929. She joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and became a renowned public speaker in Sydney's Domain and around the country.

As CPA veteran Jack Beasley noted, "Within the party, Devanny was invariably recalled as a brilliant agitational speaker, and as a stirrer who refused to accept hypocrisy".

While the CPA leadership was always ambivalent about Devanny, she was widely recognised by the rank and file of the party as a leader of the movement. Around the end of 1934, for example, a "revolutionary workers' song" circulated which compared Devanny to Rosa Luxemburg.

Ferrier writes: "A series of extraordinary conflicts was played out through and around Devanny's intrepid figure, particularly during the decades she spent in Australia. She was a key pioneer in the history of women's liberation, and attempted to live out an unfettered sexuality in environments, within and without the Party, of differently inflected intolerance."

Another CPA veteran, Fred Thompson, considered that, "... the turmoil that she created" was due to her being "a totally free spirit", with "no inhibitions about the restrictions of conforming to the norms of society at all".

"She does seem to have been



comparatively discreet about her decade-long relationship with the CPA's general secretary, J.B. Miles — or a veil of discretion was drawn over it by the Party", Ferrier notes.

Feminism

The CPA at that time, in line with the Stalinist politics which had taken over the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and operating within a sexually oppressive Australian society, did not see women's liberation as a "special question".

"Further complicating Devanny's relationship to the Party was her profession of creative artist — viewed with ambivalence by Communists and habitually considered more of a liability than an asset", Ferrier points out. Devanny's best known novels were *Sugar Heaven* (1936) and *Paradise Flow* (1938), written during her time in north Queensland in the mid-1930s to 1940s.

In 1942, she described *Sugar Heaven* as the "first really proletarian novel in Australia". It dealt with the struggle of the cane-cutters in north Queensland for action against the dreaded Weil's disease, and with it the fight by the CPA against the right-wing ALP leadership of the Australian Workers Union.

"Besides celebrating industrial militancy", Ferrier notes, "*Sugar Heaven* also sets out to combat ethnocentrism and racism (then called 'chauvinism')". In particular, the novel defended the Italian workers who were the largest migrant group in north Queensland, many of whom were Communists who had escaped from Mussolini's fascism.

Purged

In 1941, while living at Emuford, a tin-mining town near Cairns, incidents involving several male members of the CPA led to Devanny being expelled from the party, supposedly for her sexual activities. In truth, a number of CPA members resented her intervention to defend women at Emuford who were the victims of sexual assault.

Beasley said later, pointing to the suppressed facts of the matter and the lack of support for Devanny from the central party leadership, that probably "nothing more depressing and deplorable happened in the Communist movement in Australia".

The expulsion and the slanders which had accompanied her expulsion devastated Devanny and affected her political career permanently, even though the party did "cancel" the expulsion and readmit her in 1945.

Devanny was bitter about her treatment, and sought vindication. She wrestled with the problem of how to present these events in her autobiographical writings, conscious of the danger that the growing anti-Communist forces in the new period of the Cold War would use any revelations to attack the CPA in general. "I have remained unwaveringly loyal to the Communist Party for the best part of two decades because I have had increasing reason to believe that lasting peace and progress may be attained only through Party channels", Devanny wrote.

Nevertheless, Devanny resigned from the party in 1950, settling in Townsville. There she continued her writing, but had increasing difficulty getting her novels published in the reactionary and morally conservative climate of the 1950s.

Devanny rejoined the party in 1957, at a time when a flood of members, especially intellectuals, were leaving the CPA, disillusioned by the Khrushchev revelations about Stalin's crimes in 1956. She remained a member until her death from cancer in 1962.

Activism

Throughout her career as a writer, Devanny debated with friends and colleagues, such as Katherine Susannah Prichard, Miles

Franklin, Frank Hardy and Beasley, about issues such as “socialist realism” in art and literature, the tension between political activism and writing, and the key questions of race, gender and sexuality. She strongly supported Aboriginal rights, including land rights, and helped expose the scandal of the stolen generations.

Maintaining the balance between writing and activism was a life-long battle for Devanny, who had helped lead organisations like the Workers’ International Relief, the Movement Against War and Fascism, and the Fellowship of Australian Writers in the 1930s.

Recalling that period in a letter to CPA leader Lance Sharkey in the 1950s, Devanny wrote: “Remember, Lance, how in the old days we worked in a half-dozen different organisations 16 hours a day, studying at

daylight, coming home dog-tired at 11 at night to start studying again to meet requirements on the morrow? I myself, in addition, wrote books.”

The heavy pressure of her speaking and writing labours affected Devanny’s health throughout her life, causing her to suffer periods of severe mental and physical exhaustion.

Her views on “socialist realism” were probably summed up in an essay she wrote in the June 1960 *Communist Review*: “Capitalist realism presents a picture of the chaos, confusion, misery and decay of the economic of capitalism — and leaves it at that. Working class realism depicts the chaos and decay of capitalism and the struggles of workers against its demands. Add to working class realism the revolutionary way along which workers are travelling to their

final emancipation from class slavery, and we have socialist realism.”

Whatever the complexities and contradictions of Devanny’s writing and her political and personal life, she remained a committed communist to the end.

Carole Ferrier has created a rich biography of one of the unsung heroes of the Australian feminist and socialist movements by using material from people who knew Devanny, as well as drawing extensively on unpublished archives and manuscripts.

Considering the serious challenges facing the Marxist and women’s liberation movements in this country, we would do well to study the lessons of Devanny’s life and her important contribution to the progressive movement. ■

Members First result shows desire for an alternative

[June 7, 2000; #408]

By Melanie Sjoberg

“The results in the Community and Public Sector Union national election show that a large number of members oppose the policies of the leadership and are willing to back a team of progressive activists”, Jim McIlroy, Members First candidate for CPSU assistant national secretary, told *Green Left Weekly*.

Members First fielded a full ticket for national office bearer positions and won around a third of the vote, despite its low-budget, campaign. McIlroy, a Brisbane Centrelink delegate and member of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), received 34.6% in his contest with long-standing national assistant secretary Doug Lilly.

Members First candidate for national secretary, ACT assistant branch secretary Susan Carcary, won 25% of the vote against high-profile incumbent Wendy Caird. Melbourne Centrelink delegate and International Socialist Organisation member Marcus Banks received 32.7% for national president.

In a press statement released on May 29, Caird gloated that her 75% majority was the highest in the union’s history and a vindication of the CPSU leadership’s policies. She neglected to mention that less

than 16,500 members voted. This is a shockingly low turn-out; some 62,000 members (presumably the number of financial members in the federal public sector) were issued ballot papers.

Immediately before the election, the CPSU leadership sent to all members a glossy leaflet with a photo of Caird on the cover which purported to promote the union’s new organisational structure. Carcary told *Green Left Weekly* that this was thinly disguised electioneering and a blatant misuse of union funds. It demonstrated the electoral advantages that officials enjoy.

McIlroy agreed: “Given the relative resources available to the two campaigns, Members First’s result shows strong support for a change of direction for the CPSU.”

“The public sector has been under massive attack from the federal Coalition government for nearly five years. There is rampant privatisation and more than 100,000 jobs have been lost. Yet, the CPSU leadership under Caird has led constant retreats and failed to organise a united defence campaign”, McIlroy told *Green Left Weekly*.

“The Commonwealth Employment Service was destroyed with hardly a whimper, now Telstra workers are facing

full privatisation and huge job cuts and still our union does almost nothing to organise a campaign against the attacks. The CPSU has accepted the federal government’s demand for separate agency agreements. It has allowed solidarity within the union to wither on the vine.

“It is little wonder that CPSU membership is plummeting. We urgently need to turn this around. But, rather than learn from the election result, the officials are gloating about having a ‘mandate’”, McIlroy said.

Fear of debate and differing views within the union have been a long-standing trait of the national leadership. During the election campaign in October, Mathew Reynolds, who has just been elected national president, circulated an email which tried to whip up fears about Members First by charging that it has socialist allegiances, especially through the involvement of the DSP.

In Western Australia, the CPSU mailed a letter to all union members on May 15 claiming that the Members First candidate for deputy president, Sarah Harris, was not reliable because of her membership of the DSP.

“Socialist and progressive activists in the CPSU are involved with Members First. It includes members of the DSP, the International Socialists and other union militants who are fed up with the pro-Labor Party Caird group’s constant retreats. We made no secret of our political affiliations

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Judith Wright, 1915-2000

[July 12, 2000; #411]

Judith Wright, one of Australia's greatest poets and a life-long fighter for Aboriginal rights and environmental and social justice, died on June 25 in Canberra Hospital after a long illness. Her death marks the passing of one of the giants of the country's progressive cultural life.

Fellow poet Robert Gray said, "She fulfilled the highest role of the poet, she was the conscience of this country". Another poet, John Tranter, stated, "What she has left us is a spirited body of writing and a model for a humane and committed concern for the future of the human race".

Dr Veronica Brady, Wright's biographer, said, "It's very sad in a sense, with someone like Judith Wright, the spirit doesn't die ... Judith Wright's poetry came out of a deep passion for the land, for the community and for decency and justice."

Dr David Brooks, senior lecturer in

Continued from previous page.

and campaigned for a vigorous turnaround in the direction of the union", McIlroy said. McIlroy told *Green Left Weekly* that Members First's best results were where its organisation was strongest. "This included Queensland, the ACT and Victoria.

"In Queensland, Members First mailed out its main campaign leaflet to about 90% of the members. In Brisbane, Members First led a campaign to defend Telstra workers against job cuts and privatisation. Members First initiated two rallies outside Telstra buildings in the city. Another rally, with state CPSU endorsement, is planned for June 8."

Melbourne also managed a major mail-out and campaigned on delegates' democratic rights after Banks was victimised for supporting other unionists, McIlroy added.

McIlroy told *Green Left Weekly* that the CPSU is "at a turning point right now. If the Caird leadership continues to delude itself that the members are behind them and that its policies have put the union in a strong position, CPSU members are going to face even greater problems as the federal government escalates its offensive against the public sector workers." ■



Australian literature at the University of Sydney, said Wright was one of two Australian poets, with A.D. Hope, considered for the Nobel Prize for Literature. "She was a stand-out figure. She stood against the boys' club of Australian poetry and was allowed in because she was so good. Her work will live. It is not marked by the trappings of a particular period."

Born of the pioneering Wright family of New England, NSW, celebrated in her family history *Generations of Men*, Wright developed a deep identification with Aboriginal people's struggle for their land rights. She became a life-long friend of Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, then

Kath Walker, and wrote that they were sisters in their "grief for a lost country".

Wright threw herself from the 1970s into the campaign for the signing of a treaty with the Aboriginal people, a demand only recently highlighted again by the massive reconciliation march across Sydney Harbour Bridge. That walk was Wright's last public appearance.

Wright was also a passionate environmentalist. A committed member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland in the 1960s, she was an early campaigner for a number of ecological causes, in particular to protect the Great Barrier Reef, which she detailed in her 1977 book *The Coral Battleground*.

She wrote to a friend. "If the Great Barrier Reef could think, it would fear us ... Slowly but surely we are destroying those great water-gardens, lovely indeed as cherry boughs and flowers under the once clear sea."

Wright was critical of the way poetry was taught in schools, but like so many others I recall Judith's poems as the soul of Australian poetry from my school days.

Judith Wright will be remembered both as a wonderful poet and as a major progressive figure in the life of 20th century Australia.

[As one of the descendants of the Wright family of New England, NSW, I was personally linked to Judith. She was my mother's cousin and my godmother.] ■

North Queensland's hidden history

[June 27, 2001; #453]

Review by Simon Butler

The Red North: Queensland's History of Struggle by Jim McIlroy (Resistance Books, Sydney 2001, 29 pages)

Communist parliamentarians, armed rural uprisings, revolutionary soviets — this is hardly the history of Queensland that has been presented in mainstream Australian history books or high school curricula. All these, and more, are revealed in Jim McIlroy's marvellous little book.

With the success of the May 1 stock exchange blockades, activists are justifiably confident that the movement for global

justice has a future. But it is also necessary that activists of this burgeoning movement understand its connection to a radical past that has been hidden, neglected and belittled by ruling class historians and politicians.

In his new pamphlet, *The Red North: Queensland's History of Struggle*, McIlroy explains that "the radical history of Queensland is not well known to most Australians. We are better acquainted with the image of the reactionary Joh Bjelke-Petersen regime and Pauline Hanson's racist One Nation party as the symbols of Queensland politics in the national consciousness. But there is another history



Armed shearers in 1891 strike.

of Queensland, one in which some of the most important class struggles and social upheavals in Australia have occurred.”

The first of the upheavals that McIlroy documents is the great shearers’ strikes that raged through the 1890s. By the mid-19th century, Australian capitalism had developed to the point where the demands of economic growth called for the replacement of convict labour with so-called “free” wage labour. In this transitional period chronic labour shortages enabled the young Australian workers’ movement to win some impressive victories, including the world’s first eight-hour day.

Australian capitalism experienced relative boom conditions between 1870 and 1890. But when this boom inevitably came to a close, it sparked a new phase in the class struggle.

The first major battle was the maritime strike of 1890. The strike spread nationally from the wharves to the pastoral industry and to the miners and transport workers.

Responding to the Brisbane-based Australian Labour Federation’s call for a general strike in September 1890, the Brisbane *Courier* ranted: “The ALF has thrown off the mask and boldly raised the flag of national communism.”

The unions suffered from a lack of experience and coordination and the strike was defeated by October.

Then in 1891, the pastoralists went on the offensive in Queensland, drawing up a proposed agreement for the 1891 shearing season that abandoned the eight-hour day and did not recognise unions. Queensland

shearers rejected this on January 6, 1891, and the first great shearers’ strike began. The scale of the confrontation and the organisation of the strikers was unprecedented.

According to McIlroy, “confrontations occurred all over western Queensland, with armed bush cavalry riding to confront train loads of scabs, escorted by police and troops (heavily armed, with weapons including Gatling guns and even cannons)”.

The strikers established huge bush camps. These served to house and organise the strikers throughout the campaign and were run by elected committees. The strikers’ resolve was strengthened as a result of the persecution and imprisonment of key strike leaders. The high point of the struggle occurred on May 1, 1891, when 1500 armed strikers marched through the town of Barcaldine. It was Australia’s first May Day demonstration.

Ultimately, however, the union’s funds and resources were depleted and the strike ended in June 1891. The defeat of this almost insurrection (and also the later 1894 strike) has had political consequences that have shaped Australian politics to this day.

Correctly concluding that the working-class movement required a political expression, trade union leaders decided to form a political party. But unfortunately, the party they eventually formed, the Australian Labor Party, pursued a reformist and class collaborationist agenda from its inception.

Another radical flare-up occurred in Brisbane in 1919. A number of different factors contributed to a highly volatile

political atmosphere in the city at the time.

The struggle against conscription during the first world war had been fought most fiercely in Queensland. The leaders of that struggle, the Industrial Workers of the World, were still an expanding radical influence in Queensland although they had been severely repressed in other states.

Also, the dramatic impact of the 1917 Russian Revolution had the effect of sharpening class tensions in Brisbane, as it did across the world.

But the unique and decisive element was the 4000 Russian, mostly pro-Bolshevik, exiles who had fled the political repression of post-1905 Tsarist Russia. Congregating mainly in the boarding houses of South Brisbane and organised in the Union of Russian Workers (URW), the exiles played a major role in what became known as the “red flag riots”.

After the conclusion of the first world war, the federal government declared the flying of red flags a criminal offence. Meanwhile in Queensland, the Returned Servicemen’s League began to organise and even arm ex-soldiers as reactionary Australian “loyalists”.

The URW’s weekly paper was suppressed in November 1918 after it declared, “We are all brothers fighting the one enemy, capitalism ... fighting for liberty and the Red Flag”.

Soon, the URW re-constituted itself as the “Southern Soviet of Russian Workers” after Australian military intelligence raided their South Brisbane office.

The tension reached its height in March 1919 when as many as 8000 “loyalists” were organised to march from the city across Victoria Bridge to attack the soviet’s headquarters in Merivale Street. Around the same time show trials were conducted by the government for the crime of carrying a red flag. Fifteen radicals were found guilty and sentenced.

After this period of repression, the left began to revive and many “red flag” organisers and supporters became founding members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in August 1920. This laid the foundations for the next significant period in Queensland’s radical history, the CPA-inspired “Red North” of the 1930s and 1940s.

The Communist Party grew and spread its influence in North Queensland more than in any other part of the country. The

'Women can do anything!'

CPA played a crucial role in the sugar workers' campaign for the burning of cane in the northern fields. Caneworkers demanded this in order to avoid Weil's disease, a plague-like fever spread by rats. But burning represented a reduction in sugar yield so the employers insisted on a reduced rate of pay.

Caneworkers finally won the right to burn cane after a fierce campaign in 1936. The dispute highlighted a struggle for leadership of the sugar workers between the CPA and the conservative officials of the Australian Workers Union (AWU). The CPA successfully led the sugar workers, gaining much credibility and support, in the face of hostility from both the greedy employers and the AWU officials who constantly sought to restrain the militancy of the campaign.

McIlroy points to two other factors explain the CPA's growth in the north. The party built a strong base among non-Anglo (especially Italian) workers, and it was part of a remarkably strong and independent women's rights movement that grew up in the 1930s.

These were features peculiar to the CPA in north Queensland. Elsewhere, the CPA had largely succumbed to the Stalinist ideology of subordinating the question of women's liberation to the "class struggle in general".

The CPA's influence culminated with the election to state parliament of Fred Paterson for the seat of Bowen in 1944, and again in 1947. This is the only time a Communist has been elected to any Australian parliament.

In 1950, the ALP government cynically gerrymandered the Bowen electorate to split the strong CPA centre in two. This resulted in Paterson's defeat in the 1950 election.

The period of the "Red North" declined from this point on as the process of Stalinisation within the CPA and the Cold War anti-Communist crusade rolled back most of the gains and popular support won by the CPA in the 1930s and 1940s.

While not an exhaustive account of Queensland's radical history, McIlroy's *The Red North* is a significant contribution to the reclaiming of some of the anti-capitalist struggles of the past. For anti-capitalists today, the pamphlet provides valuable lessons and examples for the upheavals to come. ■

[July 31, 2002; #502]

Review by Katrina Channells & Jim McIlroy
Bend It Like Beckham. Directed by Gurinder Chadha. Starring Parminder Nagra and Keira Knightley.

This film is excellent because it encourages young women to play soccer! It is a satirical comedy about the ambitions of two young women who want to play professional soccer (or *football*). It sends up racial and gender stereotypes in contemporary multicultural London.

Two 18-year-olds, Jess Bhamra (Parminder Nagra), who worships England football star David Beckham, and Jules (Keira Knightley), who is a striker for the local women's team, the Hounslow Harriers, join together to pursue their dream of becoming famous women soccer players in the US league — the only fully professional women's competition in the world.

The ups and downs of their quest and the barriers thrown up by their families makes for funny and barbed viewing. Jess's mother dearly wants her to settle down and marry a good Indian boy from a suitable family. Jules' mother is worried her daughter's preference for football over boys might indicate lesbian tendencies.

When the young women finally achieve their goal of sporting scholarships in

California, Jess's mother finally resigns herself with the remark: "Well, at least I've taught her how to make a full Indian dinner!"

The satirical treatment of prejudiced attitudes toward same-sex relationships is another good feature of the movie.

The under-14 girls team at the New Farm United Club in Brisbane loved the film, as it showed young women can play soccer for fun, but can also be highly skilled at a traditionally male-dominated sport. They enjoyed the film's theme that "Women can do anything!"

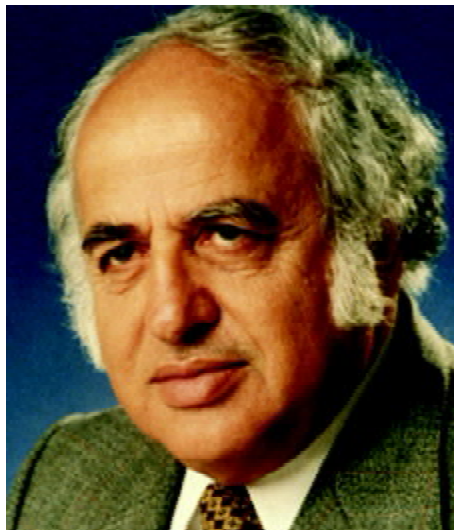
British-Indian director Gurinder Chadha, who also made the wonderful *Bhaji on the Beach*, has created a delightful film of modern multiculturalism in a Western society, full of life and colour.

How is it that countries like Britain — and even more so that so-called paradise of multiculturalism, Australia — which have had some success in mixing and matching cultures of many nations, can still be so unwelcoming to asylum seekers in genuine need?

Does this indicate the limitations of "multiculturalism" in creating a real internationalism in our relatively pampered Western societies?

Go and see this ultimate "feel good" movie for 2002! ■

George Georges, a fighter for socialist principles



[October 2, 2002; #511]

BRISBANE — Former Labor senator George Georges died in Canberra on September 23 after a long illness. He was 82. Georges was from a rare breed: an ALP politician who stood up for his principles at the cost of his parliamentary career.

Georges was a fighter for human rights and for socialist ideas. He was jailed several times in the 1970s and '80s during struggles against the attacks on civil liberties and workers' rights by the reactionary regime of Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Jailed during the right-to-march campaign of the 1970s, Georges refused to comply with a prison

rule to salute the “sovereign”.

Georges was a founder and stalwart of the Rally for Peace marches, held every Palm Sunday for the past two decades. He was also a supporter of many progressive causes, including animal liberation in the later stages of his political career, before age and illness forced him into political retirement.

Georges opposed the rightward shift of the federal ALP during the government of Prime Minister Bob Hawke in the 1980s. He warned against the deregulation of

Australia’s financial system, was opposed to the Hawke government’s decision to export uranium to France and criticised Hawke for failing to take on Bjelke-Petersen during the electricity workers’ strike in the mid-1980s.

In 1986, Georges crossed the floor to vote against the federal Labor government’s attempt to introduce a national ID card. He also refused to support the government’s deregulation of the militant Builders Labourers Federation.

Georges was forced to resign from the ALP after this, and stood as an independent socialist candidate for the Senate in the 1987 federal election. Although unsuccessful, the campaign was a model in drawing together a wide spectrum of progressive supporters in a united left campaign.

Although he eventually rejoined the ALP in 1994, Georges continued to support left causes.

George Georges was a fighter for socialist principles. He will be missed. ■

Public health: a small piece of socialism

[January 15, 2003; #521]

BRISBANE — I have recently experienced a serious operation within the public health system of Queensland. After a period of angina I was referred for cardiac investigation to the Prince Charles hospital in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. Following an angiogram, and some complications, I was eventually accepted as an inpatient for urgent heart bypass surgery.

The entire experience has convinced me more strongly than ever that we need to defend and extend the public health system of Australia. Despite all the delays and extended waiting lists, the staff shortages and bureaucratic problems of the public hospital system and the broader national health system, Medicare, our national public

health system is crucial to the interests of working people and the community.

The skills, dedication and care provided by the medical and support staff at the Prince Charles hospital were an inspiration to me. Professionalism and patient care are the watchwords of all the staff at the hospital, from the surgeons and other doctors, to the nurses, wardspeople and other support staff.

And under the public health system, a serious operation such as a heart bypass costing some \$20,000, is still available free of charge to public patients. The fact that in our free-market dominated economy, overwhelmingly subject to the private profit motive in all areas of society, a little patch of socialism can exist in the form of our beleaguered public health system is a shining

ray of light in the gloom.

The Prince Charles hospital “has the largest cardiac unit in Australia and one of the largest in the world. It is the key provider of heart-related medical services, teaching and research for Queensland, northern New South Wales, northern Australia and many large area of the Pacific region”, according to a brochure published by the Prince Charles hospital foundation.

“It is one of the world’s most advanced teaching hospitals for heart-related surgery.

“Each year approximately 15,000 patients are admitted to the Prince Charles hospital and over 100,000 patients are treated through the outpatients department. It is the only hospital in Queensland that provides medical and surgical treatment for children with cardiac disease.”

Public hospitals such as Prince Charles deserve our full support.

The historic gain represented by our public hospital system and the national health system of which it is a key part is both a precious achievement resulting from decades of struggle by a working people, and a small, partial liberated zone of socialism in a sea of privatisation and corporate domination.

Speaking to the hard-working nurses in the cardiac wards at Prince Charles and observing the long hours and difficult shifts they must do gave me further insight into the need to support the Queensland nurses’ wage and conditions claim.

In summary, we must give high priority to the defence of the public hospital and Medicare system, not only in the immediate interests of the community, but as a tiny inkling of the possibilities of a socialist future when public ownership and provision of services can be raised to the level of society as a whole. ■



The LBJ protest in Melbourne



[October 15, 2003; #557]

By Peter Boyle

An internet almanac of the 1960s, <http://www.milesgo.com/Almanac/1966.htm#October>, records the Melbourne protests against the October 1966 visit of US President Lyndon Baines Johnson with this brief entry:

“A[n] estimated 750,000 people turn out in Melbourne to welcome visiting US President Lyndon Johnson. Although most of the crowd are pro-LBJ, a strong anti-war contingent demonstrates against the visit, chanting ‘LBJ, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?’ and splattering the president’s car with paint bombs.”

One of the notorious paint bombers, David Langley, recorded his story in a book, *A decade of dissent: Vietnam and the conflict on the Australian homefront* (Allen & Unwin, 1992).

Langley and his brother John had been students in the elite private school, Melbourne Boys Grammar. They concocted the plan to lodge their personal protest against the Vietnam War.

According to David, on the day before LBJ’s visit to Melbourne, the two practised “bombing” cars with plastic bags of water thrown from a tall building. David recalls that this was not an easy task but remarkably every plastic bag of water they threw hit a car below.

On the day of the visit, David and John joined anti-war protesters in Carlton but when the route of the LBJ motorcade was diverted from there, they made their way

to South Yarra where the US President was to attend a festival.

There were no tall buildings in sight so they hid behind trees and waited for LBJ to emerge from the festival. When he did, John threw the bag of green paint and laid down before LBJ’s car. David then threw his bag of paint.

A beefy US security man punched David in the face. John was dragged off into a laneway by other security men and beaten up. Just as a stunned David was about to run off into the crowd, he was nabbed by Australian police.

The paint-throwing incident made headlines in the US, including page three in *Time* magazine.

David completed his first-year university exams in a remand cell. The Langleys were fined \$680. David believes if not for his privileged background, he and John would have been sentenced to jail.

A radical for life

While the Langley brothers participated in more anti-war demos, they never joined any political organisation.

For Jim McIlroy, another of the anti-war protesters in Melbourne when LBJ came to town, it was the beginning of a life of radical activism.

“The LBJ visit became a turning point in the development of the anti-Vietnam War movement in Australia, with thousands of protesters turning out in Melbourne and Sydney to oppose him and PM Harold Holt’s pathetic slogan, ‘All the way with LBJ’.

Similarly, the short Bush tour of Australia this month can be a launching pad for the revival of the anti-war movement in this country.

“The LBJ trip to Melbourne coincided with the last day of final term at the University of Melbourne, where I was a student. As can only be imagined, the end of the study year was a signal for alcohol-fuelled revelry by students in normal times — the arrival of the despised US president, the world’s chief warmonger of the period, on our doorstep, merely incited us to greater agitation.

“I recollect thousands of tired and emotional students, pouring out of the nearby pubs, to line Grattan Street, Carlton, alongside the university grounds, which had been advertised in that morning’s Melbourne *Age* newspaper as part of the route for the president’s official cavalcade. Police and barricades lined the roadway, and military helicopters whirred overhead.

“Of course, it was a ruse, and LBJ’s limousine with its security vehicles proceeded to turn down Elizabeth Street, on its way from the airport, to head to the city centre for the official ceremonies, leaving us noisy students in its wake.

“Well, immediately the students realised the trick, a mighty roar of anger rose up, and masses of students poured down the side streets in a drunken rage to chase LBJ’s car cavalcade to the centre of the city, where loud protests occurred, with cries of ‘Hey, hey, LBJ! How many kids did you kill today!’ and ‘Troops out of Vietnam now!’”

Today, McIlroy still hits the streets for demos and he will be protesting US President George Bush’s visit later this month. As the Brisbane branch secretary of the Democratic Socialist Party (one of the affiliates of the Socialist Alliance), he remains an unrepentant organiser for radical activism.

Keep struggling

“Johnson toured Australia to drum up support for the US-led war of aggression in Vietnam, and to thank Liberal Prime Minister Holt for Canberra’s contribution of Australian troops to the war effort against the Vietnamese people. Now, 37 years later, George W Bush is to visit this country to thank his loyal ally John Howard for Australia’s involvement in the ‘coalition of the killing’ in Iraq, and urge increased

military assistance from the Australian government in future.

“We can now, just as those pioneer protesters of 1966 did, send a clear message to Bush, Howard, Blair and Co, to get out of Iraq and allow the oppressed people of that country to decide for themselves how they will be governed in future.”

McIlroy says that anti-war activists today should appreciate how much support they already have won in the public, with polls consistently showing a majority of Australians opposed the invasion of Iraq and think that Howard lied about weapons of mass destruction to justify that war.

In the 1960s, anti-war activists faced a totally different situation.

A radical minority

“We were a small minority at that time, even among university students. One of the myths generated about the 1960s is that it just was a period of youth radicalisation”,

McIlroy explained.

“In reality, like any other period of history, the anti-war movement was fought over a long period of time. The more general radicalisation of youth developed through struggle, just as much as being a product of general social conditions.

“Conscription hit us like a bombshell. I remember rolling into the Melbourne University cafeteria at a late morning hour, a little the worse for wear, in early 1966, meeting a group of my fellow 20-year-old males, only to realise that almost all of us had won the ‘Lottery of Death’ — our birthday marbles had come out of the barrel, and we were conscripted to go to Vietnam.

“We all decided then and there that we weren’t going to fight a war against the Vietnamese people.

“Conscription focused our minds very effectively on the slaughter in Vietnam, and the need to end it as soon as possible.

“But the anti-war forces were quite isolated in the early days. I remember countless teach-ins, meetings and debates, gradually developing into pickets, marches and demonstrations, quite moderate in size at first.

Ideological battle

“We fought out the ideological battle very fiercely in those days, confronting the right-wing forces of the National Civic Council and the Democratic Labor Party, over the issue of the ‘threat from the north’, the infamous Gulf of Tonkin incident, the CIA’s White Paper on alleged Communist North Vietnamese takeover of ‘democratic South Vietnam’.

“The domino theory (that Asian countries would fall to Communism like dominoes once Vietnam was lost) was a major issue of debate. As our radicalism developed, we began to hope it was true.” ■

Jim Cairns and the dilemma of the Labor left

[October 29, 2003; #559]

Jim Cairns, the most prominent leader of the mass protests in the early 1970s against Australia’s involvement in the US war against Vietnam and standard-bearer of the Victorian ALP parliamentary left of his generation, died on October 12 at the age of 89.

Cairns is now remembered in the corporate media for his controversial role as the deputy prime minister and treasurer who was sacked by then Labor PM Gough Whitlam in 1975 for his part in the so-called “Iraqi loans scandal”, and for his much publicised affair with his personal secretary Juni Morosi. But his real legacy to the Australian labour movement rests in his central part in the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign.

According to his NSW Labor left colleague of the time, Tom Uren, as quoted in Greg Langley’s book *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the conflict on the Australian home front*: “During the 1960s, Cairns and I traveled the length and breadth of Australia speaking at universities, public meetings, trade union meetings and you name it.

“In my view, the real architect of the

leadership against the war was Cairns. He was a bloke who read extensively on the issue, felt deeply about the question, and understood the problem. He was dogged and courageous, and it was his charisma and his respect within the community which helped strengthen the movement.”

Opposed US bombing

According to Uren, Cairns’ opposition to the US aggression in Vietnam, and Australia’s growing military intervention in support of the US, began early: “The Labor Party was very confused on Vietnam until the middle of 1965. In February 1965, the caucus actually supported the American bombing of North Vietnam.

“What happened was Jim Cairns moved a resolution condemning the bombing. Kim Beazley senior then moved an amendment supporting it; the vote went in his favour. Both [Arthur] Calwell, the leader, and Whitlam, the deputy, supported that motion.”

Calwell, despite earlier vacillation on the Vietnam War issue, took a strong position against the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam in April 1965. He

reportedly enlisted Cairns’ help in writing a speech calling for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam.

Calwell took the ALP into the 1966 federal election with a principled position of opposition to conscription and for virtually immediate withdrawal of the troops. Labor was decimated by Prime Minister Harold Holt’s Liberals in that election, leading to Whitlam seizing the ALP leadership and the abandonment of Calwell’s policy of calling for Australian troops to be withdrawn from the war.

In 1968, Cairns failed by just four votes to defeat Whitlam in a parliamentary leadership challenge, based on opposition to Whitlam’s push to the right.

It was not until 1968-69, when the groundswell of public opposition to the war became more apparent as a result of the continued heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people, and the strenuous efforts of non-Labor anti-war activists, that Whitlam and the ALP leadership as a whole again began to take a somewhat stronger position against the war — sensing that this had now become a potential vote-winner.

Moratorium marches

In Victoria, where Cairns was the most prominent public figure in the Labor left, the ALP began to involve itself in the anti-war movement, and Cairns became the



Jim Cairns (centre) leading antiwar protest.

main media spokesperson for the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign in the lead-up to the mass anti-war marches in 1970.

The strength of the ALP left and Cairns' public role played a major part in building the Moratoriums significantly bigger in Melbourne than in Sydney and other cities. An unprecedented crowd of around 75,000 took over the entire centre of downtown Melbourne in September 1970 — a testimony to the massive people's power mobilisation that the Australian and international anti-Vietnam War movement had become by then.

But the strength of Cairns' public role in building the profile of the first Moratorium marches needs to be balanced with his involvement in considerable bureaucratic manoeuvring behind the scenes in seeking to keep control of the organising leadership of the movement in the hands of the ALP and its Communist Party allies.

As the prospect of an ALP victory in the next federal elections grew, the Labor Party and its allies in the anti-war movement sought to limit the exploding power and expectations of the mass movement.

Cairns allied with the conservative forces in the peace movement in attempting to downplay further mass Moratorium actions in 1971. Fortunately, these attempts were eventually defeated and the largest Moratorium mobilisation in Melbourne occurred at the end of June 1971.

Shortly after that mobilisation Coalition PM Billy McMahon announced that Australian combat troops would be

withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of the year.

Whitlam government

After the ALP won the federal election in December 1972, riding on the mass upsurge of anti-war and anti-government sentiment, Cairns held various ministerial positions in Whitlam's cabinet, eventually becoming treasurer. After the 1974 election, which Labor again won, Cairns was elected deputy leader.

By 1975, the reforming zeal of the Whitlam government was completely lost under the pressure of international recession and a campaign by the Australian capitalist ruling class for the government to impose a wage freeze. This campaign culminated in the "Canberra coup" of November 11, 1975, in which the Whitlam government was sacked by the governor-general.

Cairns himself had been sacked as treasurer by Whitlam for allegedly lying to parliament about the "loans affair". By that time, any socialist credentials Cairns had professed had been buried in the rightward shift of the Labor government under the contradictions of attempting to administer a capitalist economy in a time of crisis.

The loans affair itself was a futile attempt by resources minister Rex Connor, in collaboration with Cairns, to borrow billions of petro-dollars from the Middle East to build a natural gas pipeline from the North-West Shelf to the eastern seaboard.

After the dismissal of Whitlam in

November 1975 by Governor-General John Kerr, and the subsequent heavy defeat of the ALP by Malcolm Fraser's Liberals in December that year, Cairns faded out of Labor politics, retiring from federal parliament in 1977.

He later became involved in the Down to Earth Festival, and other alternative cultural activities, writing three books in an increasingly green utopian direction: *Growth to Freedom*, *The Untried Road* and *Towards a New Society*.

In his later years, Cairns was a regular fixture at inner-city markets in Melbourne, selling his books from a stall and talking to interested passersby.

Jim Cairns exemplifies the dilemma of the Labor left over the years — even the best mass movement leader becomes entangled in the contradictions of the ALP parliamentary machine, unless they are prepared to directly challenge the pro-capitalist framework of Labor politics.

Cairns was as good as it gets in the ALP. There has been no one since, in the ALP leadership, who has come even close to his national stature being willing to lead mass extra-parliamentary protest actions against the pro-war foreign policy of the Australian ruling class.

With the advent of the Hawke-Keating Labor governments from 1983, the rightward shift of the ALP has become so marked, and the capitulation of the Labor left so complete, that there has been no political base for a prominent left ALP figure to emerge in the country's national political life over the past few decades.

After Cairns' death, Tom Uren commented: "[He] did many great things for the ALP and for Australia, but the real tragedy of Jim Cairns was that he didn't become the driving, creative minister he could have been."

More accurately, the great tragedy of Jim Cairns was that he could not see that in order to achieve the liberation of the peoples of the Third World, epitomised in the struggle of Vietnam against the US and its Australian imperialist junior partner, it was necessary to reject the pro-capitalist straitjacket of the ALP, and build a new party for radical change out of the huge momentum developed during the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. ■

'We ignore history at our peril'

[November 5, 2003; #560]

By Robyn Marshall

BRISBANE — “As socialists, we ignore our own history at our peril”, Jim McIlroy, author of a new pamphlet by Resistance Books, *Australia's First Socialists*, told a book launch sponsored by *Green Left Weekly* on October 29.

“Contrary to a widespread myth, Australia has a rich history of class struggle, both in terms of ideas and action — up to and including the most militant, even violent, class conflict”, McIlroy told the book launch.

“In order to win the Australian working class and the oppressed to a socialist

perspective in the long run, we need to better understand the historical experiences which have shaped our unique labour moment, and which continue to influence it today.”

He went on to outline the themes of *Australia's First Socialists*, which cover the early history of the socialist movement from the 1854 Eureka stockade to the initial socialist organisations such as the Australian Socialist League and the movement for “Socialism In Our Time” in the 1890s.

McIlroy's booklet traces the history of the socialist movement in Australia from the Industrial Workers of the World, — the

Wobblies — when the Australian labour movement polarised around the issue of conscription, to the founding of the Communist Party in the early 1920s.

Also speaking at the launch was Norma Nord, a former long-time member of the Communist Party and coordinator of the Grass Roots Centre. She recounted her experiences as a young woman joining the CPA in the late 1930s. She described her involvement in the peace movement over the years, and some of the contradictions of the internal life of the CPA.

The book launch ended with discussion around issues raised in the talks and the lessons that could be drawn from them for the building of the socialist movement today. ■

Australian socialist movement's rich heritage

[November 5, 2003; #560]

Australia's First Socialists by Jim McIlroy (Resistance Books, 2003)

Review by John Nebauer

Radical politics in Australia did not begin with the formation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1891, nor was it the sole focus for radical politics prior to World War I. *Australia's First Socialists* is a very successful attempt to briefly outline the development of the Australian socialist movement to the founding of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in 1920. Written by veteran revolutionary socialist Jim McIlroy, this is a pamphlet about activists, for activists, by an activist.

As a British colony, early radicalism was naturally heavily influenced by the British movement. As early as 1834, the Tolpuddle Martyrs — six farm labourers — were transported as convicts to New South Wales for their trade union activity. At first, radical ideas were largely influenced by the Chartists (a mass working-class movement for democratic rights) and Irish republicanism.

These influenced the Eureka Stockade rebellion at Ballarat in 1854, which was triggered by the imposition of fees for gold prospecting licences by the Victorian colonial government. McIlroy notes that the Eureka Stockade was “a popular revolt against the

unfair taxation and repressive policing”. The American Revolution that led to the creation of the United States was triggered by similar events.

As Karl Marx wrote: “We must distinguish between the riot in Ballarat... and the general revolutionary movement in the State of Victoria. The former will by this time have been suppressed; the latter can only be suppressed by far-reaching concessions (“The Buying of Commissions — News from Australia”, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 14)”

This assessment proved correct. McIlroy points out that despite the diggers' military defeat at Eureka, by 1856 they had received the right to vote, with universal manhood suffrage (women's suffrage was not achieved at a national level until 1902).

An organised socialist movement took a little longer to get off the ground. McIlroy notes that Australia's first prominent socialist organisation was the Democratic Association of Victoria. Influenced by the utopian socialism of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, the DAV was essentially a moral reform society. Its program was nonetheless also partly influenced by the International Working Men's Association (the First International) in Europe. The DAV was accepted as its “Australian section” and a delegate was present at the international's

Hague congress in September 1872.

A more solidly based left-wing organisation was the Australian Socialist League (ASL), founded in 1887. It linked with Australia's first regular socialist newspaper, the *Radical*, which was founded in Newcastle the same year. McIlroy notes the ASL's heavy involvement in the great strikes of 1891-94.

The ASL was involved in founding the ALP in 1891 and maintained its affiliation until 1898. The ASL campaigned within the ALP for socialism against the party's right wing. After a last ditch effort to force the ALP to accept a pledge to nationalise industry in 1897, the ASL split with the ALP to establish a socialist organisation in competition with it. The new party did moderately well in the 1901 Senate election and in the 1903 Senate election its lead candidate received around 26,000 votes.

The industrial militancy of the 1890s led to the creation of a plethora of socialist organisations alongside the ASL. Some, such as the Bellamy Society (named after American journalist Edward Bellamy), founded by William Lane, were influenced by utopian socialists or the English Fabians. Others such as the Socialist Labor Party (influenced by US socialist leader Daniel De Leon) were more militant but very sectarian.

McIlroy devotes a considerable portion of *Australia's First Socialists* to the Industrial Workers of the World. Greatly influenced by its US counterpart, the IWW (or the “Wobblies”) eschewed political activity in favour of industrial action and agitation for

the creation of “One Big Union”, through which the working class would cripple the power of the capitalists through industrial muscle alone. The IWW attracted many socialists to its ranks. Its newspaper, *Direct Action*, helped build its profile amongst union militants.

The IWW grew to be the biggest focus of working-class radicalism outside the ALP prior to World War I. It waged a heroic fight against the inter-imperialist war, and was active in the huge anti-conscription mass movements of 1916 and 1917. The IWW was targeted in a vicious campaign by the ruling class. The IWW was banned and the organisation was crippled by 1919.

McIlroy argues that the campaign against the IWW exposed the group’s main shortcoming — its failure to grasp the need for a working-class movement with the aim of taking political power away from the capitalist class, destroying the capitalist state and building new organs of working-class rule. The IWW believed it would be sufficient to take control of the factories and workplaces via the One Big Union.

Still, the IWW had much going for it. The IWW took an uncompromising stand against racism despite the popularity of the White Australia Policy amongst sections of the working class and labour movement. As McIlroy writes: “The issue of the White Australia Policy remained a bugbear for the Australian Socialist movement in the early

years of the 20th century — until challenged by the new broom of the [IWW].”

The IWW was also far ahead of other socialist organisations in attempting to incorporate women into the organisation. The IWW championed equal pay for all, and recognised the exploitation of women in the workforce and at home. Women were involved in the everyday public activity of the IWW in greater numbers than in other socialist organisations, and produced prominent leaders such as Annie Westbrook in Perth, and May Ewart and Lesbia Keogh in Sydney.

McIlroy concludes the booklet with the formation of the CPA, and engages in some interesting speculation on what shape the revolutionary party may have taken had the IWW survived. He argues that there might have been a positive cross-fertilisation between the two traditions. The IWW, sharper on the questions of the role of the ALP, racism and the war, would have been a positive influence on the development of Australian communism.

“How many more workers would have been educated about what socialism really is and could become if there were some good debates between the IWW and the CPA, hopefully leading to unification and a much stronger revolutionary organisation?”, McIlroy asks. Such an organisation would still have come under enormous pressure as the international communist movement

became dominated by Stalinism, but perhaps such debates could have made the CP more resilient to it.

Today’s rebels should know about activists such as Monty Miller, whose political life spanned the period McIlroy’s pamphlet covers. A miner on the Victorian goldfields, Miller may have been at Eureka, but even if he wasn’t, he quickly imbibed its radicalism. After leaving the goldfields, Miller took part in Melbourne’s trade union movement as a member of the carpenter’s union. He took part in the strike waves of the 1890s (in Perth). He was arrested in 1916 (at 77) during the crackdown on the IWW. Charged with sedition, he was sentenced to six months’ hard labour. Released in the ensuing public outcry, Miller welcomed the victory of the Russian Revolution in November 1917.

On his last demonstration (in Brisbane), demanding the repeal of the War Precautions Act, Miller was attacked by police. He was anxious to ensure that his political legacy was taken up by a new generation. And so it was. The foreword to his book *Labor’s Road to Freedom* was written by a young novelist named Katherine Susannah Pritchard, a member of the newly formed CPA.

More people should know about the rich heritage of the early Australian socialist movement. McIlroy is to be commended for making it accessible. ■

Finding Brisbane’s radical heart

[November 17, 1993; #588]

Radical Brisbane: An unruly history. Edited by Raymond Evans & Carole Ferrier (Vulgar Press, Melbourne 2004, 329 pages)

Radical Brisbane: An unruly history is a timely reminder that Australian cities, and Brisbane in particular, have a history of popular struggles and progressive ideas, sometimes virtually unknown to a modern audience.

Most people until recently have thought of Queensland, and its capital city Brisbane, as the home of the dictatorial, right-wing Joh Bjelke-Petersen regime and the racist One Nation movement launched by Pauline Hanson. But Brisbane experienced the sharpest industrial confrontation in Australian history in the 1890s shearers’

strikes, and the first general strike in the country in 1912.

Queensland elected the first Labor Party government in the world in 1899, experienced the longest period of Labor Party administration of any state, and was probably more dominated by the country’s most right-wing union, the Australian Workers Union (AWU), than by the National Party, over the whole course of the 20th century.

It shouldn’t be forgotten that the electoral gerrymander that Joh Bjelke-Petersen used with such success to entrench his National Party regime was initiated by the Hanlon Labor government specifically to eliminate the country’s only ever Communist Party member of parliament, Fred Paterson, in

1950!

Radical Brisbane reminds us of the other side of Brisbane’s history: the people’s campaigns for justice and social change, the mobilisations in the streets around a variety of issues, even outbreaks of violence and street-fighting, in a city until recently regarded more as a sleepy, overgrown country town, than a bustling, modern metropolis.

“*Radical Brisbane* mines history from below, without losing sight of the power of capital organised by the state”, Marxist historian Humphrey McQueen, an early veteran of the student revolt at University of Queensland in the 1960s, notes in his foreword to the book.

“As we worked on this book”, editors Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier observe in their introduction, “we began to realise that it was not so much that nothing had happened of historical worth or note, but

rather the opposite: that so much had occurred over a 180-year time-frame that it would be impossible to do it full justice in one volume...

“... [Brisbane] is ... the place of cruel floggings and public executions along Queen Street. It saw the Bread or Blood riots, frontier repressions and concerted anti-Chinese agitation. In its streets, people agitated for civil and democratic rights and in its suburbs, dreamers dreamed of socialist utopias.

“It has hosted wildly conceived affairs like the Pineapple Rebellion and the Battle of Brisbane. During a street clash in 1912 a 73-year-old woman unionist unhorsed the Police Commissioner with her hatpin. In World War I, it was Australia’s most disloyal capital and in World War II, its most unruly.

“It has endured sectarian disturbances, larrikin excesses and Australia’s first rock’n’roll riot. And all this happened before the better known ‘radical times’ of the 1960s and 1970s — the struggles against the Vietnam War, military conscription and Apartheid and for women’s rights, indigenous rights, gay rights, union rights and the right to march.”

The story is told through 50 chapters, by a variety of authors. It begins with the assassination of the brutal Penal Commandant of Moreton Bay prison in 1830 and ends with the struggle for Aboriginal land rights, focused on Musgrave Park.

The chapters are linked to sites, buildings and street addresses, which often today have disappeared under the wrecker’s ball or been transformed into quite different usages, in contemporary, commercial, trendy urban Brisbane.

In 1890, the first Women’s Union was established in a building near where the statue of one of its founders, labour movement activist and suffragette Emma Miller, now stands, in King George Square. Although it only lasted a short time, collapsing after the defeat of the 1891 shearers’ strike, the Brisbane Women’s Union broke new ground in organising women workers, employing a woman organiser, and putting the issues faced by women in the workforce directly on the labour movement agenda.

The book describes the militant struggles of the Industrial Workers of the World and other socialists to establish the right to free speech, from 1913 onwards. Another



Fred Paterson speaking in Sydney Domain (1948).

chapter recounts the riot that occurred in July 1917 in the School of Arts building in Ann Street between pro-conscription and anti-conscription women (led by the Women’s Peace Army), prior to the second, failed conscription referendum, later that year.

A remarkable section outlines the near civil war crisis that erupted in November 1917 when the federal government under PM Billie Hughes moved to prevent the publication of a special edition of the Queensland Government Gazette, in which Labor Premier T.J. Ryan had read into Hansard the anti-conscription case.

There is the story of the unemployed camps around Brisbane in the 1930s, hotbeds of radical organising by the Communist Party and the Unemployed Workers Union; the progressive theatre and literary groups, and left bookshops, which flourished in Brisbane in the 1930s and later; and the brutal bashing by police of Fred Paterson, following a mass upsurge of unionists in support of striking railway workers.

The remarkable initiative by two Brisbane women in chaining themselves to the bar of the Regatta Hotel, Toowong, to demand the right of women to drink in public bars in March 1965 was an early landmark in the second wave feminist movement in Australia — on a unique Australian issue!

“For more than 60 years, the Communist Party of Australia was an active participant in political, industrial and social struggles in Brisbane. Established in the early 1920s it was easily the most important left-wing

body in Queensland — and vastly more influential than any other organisation, albeit with a state-wide membership of only a few thousand.

“For most of its history, the CPA was the only political party willing to fight consistently for a better deal for Brisbane’s working class and, despite vociferous opposition from reactionary forces, it helped improve the lives of innumerable workers and their families”, the book states.

The story of student activism at the University of Queensland in the 1960s and 1970s is told, from the founding of the New Leftist SDA (Society for Democratic Action) in 1966, to the anti-Vietnam War protests of the late 1960s and the Moratoriums of the early 1970s.

Radical Brisbane recounts the anti-racist protests which greeted the South African Springbok rugby union team which played in Brisbane in July 1971 as part of its Australian tour. This chapter describes how Bjelke-Petersen declared a state of emergency, and Queensland police staged a vicious attack on peaceful anti-apartheid protesters.

This led to the Bjelke-Petersen government’s infamous ban on street marches in 1978-79, and the massive upsurge of struggle for the right to march which erupted in the late 1970s. The book outlines these civil liberties protests, and the thousands of arrests which were carried out by the Queensland police.

Radical Brisbane is a revelation in bringing to public attention so many hidden areas of social unrest and struggle over a century and a half of the history of Queensland’s capital. While the chapters are not integrated into one narrative, and the whole book therefore appears to lack a central theme at times, the overall content makes it an absorbing and fascinating read.

As *Radical Brisbane* takes the story only to the end of the 1970s, it is to be hoped the editors have a plan to prepare Volume 2 to continue the history of the city’s social struggles up to the present day. As the editors note in their introduction, “We think of it... not as just a book about the rough and tumble of past campaigns, but rather as one of present empowerment in a city and country in much need of regaining its radical heart.” ■

Labor's rightward trajectory

[December 15, 2004; #610]

The Origins of the ALP: A Marxist Analysis
by Jim McIlroy (Resistance Books, 2004)

Review by Chris Atkinson

The further 2.4% swing to the Greens in the federal election indicates a rising recognition that Labor offers no real alternative to PM John Howard and the Coalition. Jim McIlroy's new pamphlet *The Origins of the ALP: A Marxist Analysis* is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the origins of Labor's headlong rush further to the right.

McIlroy traces the formation of the ALP in the early 1890s, after the great maritime and shearers' strikes, through to its consolidation as a reformist, parliamentarist party in the early 20th century. The ALP's formation reflected an advance in working-class consciousness. Its founders recognised that the bosses used the colonial parliaments as weapons against workers and that the labour movement needed its own political party to win governmental power to advance its interests against those of the capitalists.

The British settler states that united into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 shared the British empire's super-profits from the exploitation of its Asian colonies. These super-profits enabled the emerging independent Australian capitalist class to consolidate itself and foster a privileged and protected aristocracy of labour among the better-paid, skilled sections of the working class.

It was upon this conservative layer of workers and union officials that the ALP based itself. Placing defence of their own social privileges before the long-term interests of the working class, this labour bureaucracy shared the ideological outlook of the middle classes — the shopkeepers, professionals and farmers. These union bureaucrats sought to harmonise the interests of labour and capital, which meant supporting the capitalist status quo. The party's pro-capitalist character quickly became entrenched, and remains to this day.

V Lenin's insightful and rather funny 1913 article *In Australia* appends McIlroy's essay. In it Lenin accurately characterises the ALP as "a liberal capitalist party". Lenin asks rhetorically what sort of a peculiar capitalist

country is this in which the workers' representatives dominate parliament and yet capitalism is in no danger?

The pamphlet is an argument against the mistaken view, still held by many on the left, that the ALP is a workers' party, albeit with a pro-capitalist leadership. By basing the pamphlet on the historical development of the ALP, McIlroy undercuts the plethora of idealised accounts of Labor's formation that suggest the ALP was formed by some mythical spontaneous movement of rank-and-file workers. It joins Ray Markey's *Making of the Labor Party in*

NSW in its compelling explanation of how the radical and socialist elements who helped form the party were defeated by an alliance of parliamentarians and union bureaucrats.

McIlroy points out that the ALP's accelerated rightward trajectory in the 1990s coincided with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the decline of the Communist Party. This has left a big vacuum to Labor's left and the Greens are its main electoral beneficiary. This vacuum, McIlroy concludes, makes the task of building a genuine working-class alternative — a socialist party — to eventually challenge the Labor Party for leadership of the Australian workers' movement more urgent than ever. ■

'Godparents of the activist core' take up post in Venezuela

[November 17, 1993; #653]

By Adam Baker

BRISBANE — Since their arrival here in 1987, Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter have become permanent fixtures in the local activist scene. There has been barely a left or progressive campaign in the last 18 years that has not benefited from their input.

Now the pair are taking up a new challenge — moving to Venezuela for 12 months to head up *Green Left Weekly's* Caracas bureau. From there they will file frequent reports on developments in the Venezuelan revolution, which is taking Latin American and world politics by storm.

It will be a particularly important time for the government of President Hugo Chavez, and the revolutionary movement. Presidential elections are scheduled for the end of the year and the possibility of United States intervention to prevent another win by Chavez is, unfortunately, all too real.

A farewell party for Coral and Jim, held at the Brisbane Activist Centre on January 14, was attended by around 50 activists, including from Australian Aid for Ireland, the Latin American left, anti-nuclear and anti-war campaigners, and activists from various socialist organisations. Entertainment by Indigenous band Black Velvet, as well as performances from Mark Cronin and Ovideo Orellana, capped off the

night.

Murri leader Sam Watson described Jim and Coral as "the godparents of the activist core" in Brisbane, remarking that it will be different to be in West End, or at a rally, and not be confronted by Jim or Coral selling *Green Left* and handing you a leaflet or three for upcoming political events. Ray Ferguson from the Communist Party of Australia reminisced about the valiant attempts in the 1980s to unite the (then) Socialist Party of Australia and the (then) Democratic Socialist Party, in which Jim and Coral played a part.

Coral said the trip to Venezuela was "a once in a lifetime opportunity to see firsthand how a revolution is actually carried out". We look forward to sharing that experience through Jim and Coral's reports in *Green Left Weekly* throughout 2006. ■

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'The goal of socialism is alive'

[January 26, 2007; #696]

By Paul Benedek

BRISBANE — “The goal of socialism is alive; we have seen the future in revolutionary Venezuela”, Australian activists Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy told a public meeting on January 26. The two have recently returned from a year in the capital, Caracas, reporting on events for *Green Left Weekly*.

“President Hugo Chavez declared in early January, ‘We’re on our way to socialism, and nothing and no-one can prevent it’. This just confirms what we saw over 12 months of living inside the Bolivarian revolution. It is sweeping the old order aside and increasingly placing power in ordinary

people’s hands”, McIlroy said.

The two resided in a poor, working-class neighbourhood of Caracas. They took an active part in many struggles, witnessing grassroots education and health missions (social projects), empowered indigenous communities, environmental collectives, worker-controlled factories and the new institutions of people’s power — the communal councils.

Wynter and McIlroy helped organise Australian solidarity brigades to Venezuela during 2006, culminating in a tour at the time of the successful re-election of socialist president Hugo Chavez. Chavez won a huge majority of 63% in last December’s poll.

“The Chavez government has seized back

control of the country’s enormous oil resources from the traditional oligarchy and foreign petroleum corporations, and is using this wealth to fund huge improvements in health, education and living conditions for the great majority of the people”, Wynter added. Venezuela’s “socialism of the 21st century” is a beacon of hope for people power in a world of war and exploitation, they concluded.

Wynter and McIlroy will present a multimedia forum about their experiences on February 3, at 7pm (6pm for refreshments) at the CEPU Auditorium, 41 Peel Street (corner Merivale Street), South Brisbane.

The forum is being organised by *Green Left Weekly* and sponsored by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network. ■

Support Pakistan democracy activists!

[November 23, 2007; #733]

Protesting journalists in Pakistan were beaten by police on November 21. I travelled to Pakistan earlier this year, and I wish to show my solidarity with the brave struggle for justice being waged against General Pervez Musharraf’s dictatorship.

The responses to Musharraf’s crackdown on dissent from PM John Howard and ALP leader Kevin Rudd have been ludicrous. Neither of them care one iota for the rights of the people of Pakistan. They call for a return to “stability” — but there has been no stability for the people of Pakistan who have opposed the Musharraf dictatorship since he took power in 1999.

The Australian government should demand the lifting of the state of emergency and the immediate release of all the judges, lawyers, trade unionists, human rights activists and civil society activists who have been arrested.

If Howard and foreign minister Alexander Downer were seriously concerned about what is happening in Pakistan, they would be calling for the treason charges against trade union leader Liaquat Ali Shah and four others to be dropped. The treason charge carries a death penalty.

They would also be calling for the anti-

terrorist charges against leaders of the Labour Party Pakistan to be dropped.

The Socialist Alliance, of which I am a member, stands strongly with the struggle against the Musharraf dictatorship. When I traveled through Pakistan earlier this year, I met with many brave activists who risk everything in their fight for justice. It is these people that we should be supporting – not a US backed dictator.

The Howard government has supported Musharraf’s government since he carried out his military coup in 1999, while at the same time following in the steps of the US government in labelling Venezuela’s popularly elected socialist President Hugo Chavez a “dictator”. This shows the hypocrisy of Howard’s supposed support for democracy.

The Chavez forces have faced 11 democratic elections since 1998, and in the presidential elections in December 2005, to which I was a witness, Chavez won the highest majority in Venezuelan history. ■

Aboriginal activist: 'We must continue to mobilise'

[December 7, 2007; #735]

BRISBANE — The defeat of the Howard government in the November 24 federal election was “a great victory for the Australian working class”, Sam Watson, leading Aboriginal activist and Queensland Senate candidate for the Socialist Alliance, told *Green Left Weekly*. “John Howard has been cast out, senior ministers defeated, and many Coalition seats now made marginal. This represents a realignment of working-class forces in the country”, Watson added.

“It also represents a win for the strong

and successful campaign by the trade union movement against Howard’s hated Work Choices laws”, he said. “The unions were ably supported by groups like Socialist Alliance, which was able to attack the ruling class on wider issues, such as the rights of Aborigines and refugees, health, education, and civil liberties.

“There was a great deal at stake on November 24. The future of the country was in the balance. If Howard had won again, it would have been a disaster for all workers and oppressed people. But we can’t let it

rest at this point. We need to ensure that the Rudd government delivers on its promises, where they are positive. And we need to pressure the new Labor government to go much further.

“We know that Kevin Rudd is soft on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, soft on climate change, and on Aboriginal issues. We, the working class of Australia, must continue to mobilise and confront the government to ensure that the journey which has been started is kept going to the end.

“This election has shifted the political goalposts to a new level. Ironically, the opinion polls tend to indicate that few voters actually changed their minds during the course of this year — despite the millions of dollars spent on TV advertising, the leaders jetting around the country, and so on, during the campaign.

“Ordinary people were open to engaging with smaller parties like SA, which was the experience reported to me by people around

Queensland. Members of SA can be pleased with the campaign, and look forward to new challenges at the local, state and national level.”

On the question of Aboriginal rights, he said: “The most forward-thinking party was Socialist Alliance — the only one to talk about deaths in custody, opposition to the Northern Territory invasion and a treaty with the Aboriginal people. SA took up positions that many middle-of-the-road Aboriginal leaders went along with the Howard government on.

“The new Rudd government must understand that the living conditions of most Aboriginal people are totally unacceptable today. The key issues of under-resourcing of Aboriginal services must be fixed urgently. At all times, the government must work with Aboriginal people and communities, not intervening against them.

“The entire Australian economy and

society is based on Aboriginal land. It is time to give back some of what was plundered from Aboriginal soil.

“SA always strongly opposed the Howard government’s conduct of Aboriginal affairs. As Aboriginal people, we cannot afford any longer to be guided by self-proclaimed Aboriginal leaders like Noel Pearson, who sat at the feet of John Howard and his ilk.

“The only way forward is for the new government to co-operatively engage with legitimate Aboriginal leaders and communities. The key issues for us are jobs, housing, proper education, health-care, clean drinking water, and adequate infrastructure. We need genuine, new pathways forward for our children.

“We urgently need a new national Aboriginal representative body. Most importantly, such a body needs to be based on the full empowerment of the Aboriginal people.”■

The Tet Offensive: The Vietnamese people turn the tide of history

[January 24, 2008; #737]

Forty years ago, the Tet Offensive changed the course of the Vietnam War and world history. On January 31, 1968, fighters of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) — known dismissively as the “Vietcong” — launched an all-out assault on cities and towns throughout US-occupied South Vietnam, catching the US and its puppet regime completely by surprise, and stunning the world with their courage and audacity.

This offensive forced the beginning of the US’s long retreat that eventually led to the victory of the national liberation forces against the world’s biggest superpower with the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

The Tet Offensive was the first major event during revolutionary 1968, described by writer Tariq Ali as “the year that changed the world”. The offensive turned the tide of the US war drive, which, if successful in Vietnam, threatened to reverse the gains of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutions of the post-World War II era.

The heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people for national liberation and socialist

transformation opened up a period of struggle and radical change around the world, including in the US and other advanced capitalist countries.

All-out assault

Preceded by a wave of attacks on military bases in the countryside on January 30, 1968, the main offensive began on the morning of January 31 — the Tet lunar new year holiday in Vietnam. It was well coordinated, with more than 80,000 NLF and NVA troops striking over 100 towns and cities, including the national capital, Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City).

“In Saigon the attack ... was launched by some 5000 troops who had infiltrated the city in the weeks prior to the offensive”, Douglas Welsh wrote in *The History of the Vietnam War*.

Welsh wrote that the fighters entered Saigon disguised as peasants celebrating the Tet holiday “and carried no weapons, or any other objects that could betray them. Weapons and uniforms were smuggled in separately in laundry trucks, by vendors and even through staging bogus funerals for South Vietnamese soldiers. Once inside the

city the troops assembled in predetermined areas to form their units and be issued with their equipment.

“The preparations were managed so well that no-one suspected. One NVA soldier revealed under interrogation after the offensive that many units test fired their weapons in the evenings during fireworks displays.

“When the attack began, Saigon was taken completely by surprise. The entire city came under attack simultaneously.”

The liberation forces targeted key institutions of US and South Vietnamese government rule in order to have the biggest political impact, including the US embassy, as John Pimlott described in *Vietnam: The decisive battles*.

“The embassy assault was easily countered, but not before the press had a field day. Pictures of US civilian staff helping to dislodge enemy guerrillas, followed by photographs of those same guerrillas lying dead on the well-kept lawns of the embassy building, came as a shock to the American public.

“Any belief in [US Army supreme commander General] Westmoreland’s



Vietnamese liberation forces advance.

recent claim that the war was being won rapidly faded as people began to ask an obvious question: 'If we are winning, how come the Communists are still active in downtown Saigon?' President [Lyndon] Johnson had no ready answer and, as even more shocking pictures emerged — such as that of a VC suspect being summarily executed in the street or of US helicopters pouring rockets into residential sectors of the city — the 'credibility gap' between the administration and the people widened."

Dramatic effect

The Tet Offensive changed the direction of the Vietnamese national liberation struggle, aiming at drawing in the entire population of the south. Steve Forrest explained in an article on Marxist.com that the campaign had been "in preparation since a study carried out by [North Vietnamese military commander] General Giap in September 1967 had concluded that the war had reached a 'stalemate' situation and that something needed to be done ... Vietcong leaders had carried out a vigorous propaganda campaign in order to prepare their forces."

"As a minimum the Tet outbreak would force the halting of the aerial bombardment of North Vietnam and force the Americans into negotiations", Forrest wrote. "As a maximum the offensive could drive the Americans out of Vietnam all together,

opening up the path to liberation and unification."

While not meeting its major objectives, the offensive was a major turning point. "According to US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, 'Henceforth, no matter how effective our action, the prevalent strategy could no longer achieve its objectives within a period or within force levels politically acceptable to the American people.'"

"The Vietcong", Forrest explained, "had hoped their liberation of towns and cities would lead to an uprising against the Americans; they believed that the South's weary soldiers, dislocated peasantry, fractious youth and widely discontented layers of South Vietnamese society were ready to join the struggle. However, this only occurred on a sporadic basis."

Although US and South Vietnamese forces managed to retake most of Saigon within days, the mainly Chinese area of Cholon was occupied by NLF and NVA fighters for weeks. The US was forced to destroy the entire suburb in order to drive out the resistance forces, and many thousands of civilians were killed and wounded.

Hue overrun

The second main target of the Tet Offensive was the ancient city of Hue to the north, which had been the historic capital of the Annam civilisation. In contrast to Saigon,

Hue was overrun and captured by the NLF and NVA within hours on January 31.

According to Welsh, "By the afternoon of that first day, the NVA/VC had raised their flag over the Citadel of the city and had freed more than 2000 political prisoners and 400 of their own troops from the jails".

Radio broadcasts were made throughout the south calling on the people to rise up against the US and its puppet regime. "It was in Hue that the largest demonstration of support was given to the NVA/VC", wrote Welsh. "Students and professors rallied to support their 'liberators', while most of the local population tried to flee the city before the Americans and South Vietnamese began their counterattack. As in Saigon, the Buddhists, who felt they had no representation in the South Vietnamese government, aligned themselves with the Communist forces."

The liberation forces held on to Hue for a month, until pushed out by massive military firepower and troop concentrations. The struggle for Hue became one of the longest and bloodiest battles in the Vietnam War.

Another key battle took place at the strategic US base of Khe Sanh, near the Laotian border. Although the NVA began its assault there on January 21, before the Tet Offensive proper began, the struggle continued until April, tying down a large number of US troops, aircraft and equipment.

It was during the Tet Offensive that a US army major, standing in the midst of a provincial city levelled by US bombing, made the infamous statement: "It was necessary to destroy the town in order to save it." Broadcast globally, this remark helped to further erode public support for the US war.

The Tet Offensive followed five years of continual escalation of the US's invasion and occupation of South Vietnam. In early 1964, the US launched "Operation Rolling Thunder" — the largest bombing campaign in history, during which more bombs were dropped on North Vietnam than were expended in the whole of World War II. In the following five years, the US dropped 7 million tonnes of bombs and defoliants. Some 2.6 million Vietnamese people were killed.

In 1963, the US deployment in Vietnam was 23,300 personnel. This jumped to 184,000 in 1966 and peaked at 542,000 in January 1969. Around 50,000 US soldiers were killed during the Vietnam War and around 250,000 wounded.

During the Tet Offensive, some 6000 US and South Vietnamese puppet regime troops were killed, and there were an

estimated 30,000-50,000 NVA and NLF deaths. Civilian deaths were much higher.

While North Vietnam and the NLF suffered enormous losses during the Tet campaign, and were largely unable to ignite a popular uprising in the southern cities, the political impact on the US and its allies was devastating.

Johnson was forced to withdraw from the 1968 US presidential poll. The road was opened for the commencement of peace talks with North Vietnam, which began under Richard Nixon's presidency in 1969.

The US began a five-year-long retreat, which ended in total defeat.

Lessons for today

Today, the US is again mired in unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The administration of President George Bush has re-launched the longstanding US imperialist dream of an "American Century" of neo-colonial world domination, this time under the guise of the "war on terror".

The Iraqi popular resistance to US occupation again reminds us that peoples of the Third World will always rise up and fight resolutely against imperialist

aggression. The ongoing US-led war for oil in the Middle East will be defeated, just as the Vietnamese people overcame the mighty US war machine four decades ago.

In Latin America, Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution is battling against US imperialism and inspiring popular upsurges in Bolivia and elsewhere in the continent, and proving an increasing inspiration to struggling peoples all over the world.

Forty years after the dazzling achievements of the Vietnamese people in the Tet Offensive, and their unrelenting struggle that smashed the US war drive of the 1960s and early 1970s, we must learn from their example. The anti-war movement of today can take heart from Tet, just as the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s was given enormous impetus from those events.

Just as the Tet Offensive in Vietnam changed the course of modern history, the struggle against US imperialism in the Middle East and Latin America today can open a new era of radical social change in the 21st Century. ■

Unions can grow stronger, say militant leaders

[April 23, 2008; #747]

"The union movement can fight back and grow overall in the next period", Tim Gooden, secretary of the Geelong Trades Hall Council, told *Green Left Weekly* on April 18. He was responding to reports in the mainstream press highlighting figures indicating a further fall in national union membership last year.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures reported in the April 15 Sydney Morning Herald, total union membership fell by 5%, or 89,000, in the year to August 2007.

In August 1986, union membership was 2.6 million or 46% of the work force. Ten years later, it had fallen to 31%. Total union membership last August was 1.7 million or 19% of the work force.

"The union movement showed its underlying strength by mobilising its members massively against the Howard

government's anti-worker Work Choices laws, and playing a decisive role in bringing down the Coalition government last year", said Gooden. "Unions which are prepared to adopt a militant approach have proved they can win gains and increase their membership."

ACTU president Sharan Burrow pointed out that the new data understated union membership and ignored the hostile climate unions faced during the last term of the Howard government.

"The data shows unions have successfully survived Work Choices", Burrow was quoted as saying in the April 15 SMH. She argued that the ABS survey was conducted "at the height of the former Howard government's scare campaign against unions. In this environment, it is quite likely that workers may have been reluctant to admit to being a union member to the government statistician."

Burrow said that ACTU affiliates had experienced an increase in membership applications after the defeat of the Howard government in the federal election last November.

Dean Mighell, secretary of the Victorian branch of the Electrical Trades Union, which has doubled its membership over the last 10 years, told the April 15 SMH that a cosy relationship with the Rudd Labor government, similar to the accords that the unions signed with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, would be disastrous.

"We don't want any more accord-style deals", Mighell said. "The last time we did that the unions took a big sleeping tablet. All we want is a fair go with the industrial laws."

He said unions had traded shop-floor activism for perceived influence with Labor governments. "Having polite coffees with ministers is no substitute for organising", Mighell said.

Chris Cain, WA branch secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, in an article in the April 2008 edition of the WA MUA newspaper entitled, "WA Branch continues to grow: militant and involved membership

is the key”, noted: “Many unions have seen their numbers shrink and with that their ability to influence the industrial and political landscape ... By contrast, during this time the experience of the WA Branch of the MUA could not have been more stark. Since mid-2003 its growth has been staggering, given the conservative government and experiences of other unions. Since June 2003 the WA Branch has grown about 60%. On average, that's more than 10% per year ...

“We are a union that believes in building strength through our members and the elected delegates. This is the foundation of the growth of the WA Branch. The figures speak for themselves.”

Commenting on the ABS figures, a spokesperson for federal workplace relations minister Julia Gillard told the SMH that while “it is not for government to denigrate unions ... it is also not for government to artificially prop up union membership”.

Gooden told *GLW* that “the Rudd Labor government is hell bent on continuing the Howard regime’s policy of shackling the union movement by retaining harsh legal restrictions on right of entry to worksites for union officials, hindering them from recruiting new members, among other essential duties.

“The union movement now faces a challenge and an opportunity. If we mobilise our members to demand the Rudd government abolish all of Work Choices, including the ban on right of entry, and pursue strong policies to win back our union rights and conditions, we have a real chance to reverse the longstanding decline in membership.” ■

Union organising in call centres

[May 24, 2008; #752]

BRISBANE — High work pressure, staff turnover, intrusive management monitoring of workers' performance and alienation were identified as major issues facing call centre workers, at a May 22 forum organised by Worklife.

Bob Russell, a Griffith University researcher, explained that call centres have been one of the fastest growing sectors of the Australian and world economy, with some 4000 centres currently employing around 250,000 workers in Australia. Companies and governments use call centres to cut costs by reducing the need for face-to-face customer service.

Katrina Barben, a phone counsellor at Kids Helpline, outlined issues facing workers in this critical area and explained that union

organising was important to protect wages and conditions.

Jim McIlroy, a former Community and Public Sector Union delegate in Centrelink, related the challenges facing unions organising in public service call centres. Constant pressure for increased productivity and more complex work have caused rising stress levels and a need for strong union activity, he said.

Australian Services Union organiser John Kelly described the extreme management practices in many private companies, leading to increased competition between workers. He said the union had achieved some “good wins” in private call centres by organising outside the sites before moving openly into the workplace. ■

Landmark Jobs for Women campaign



[September 13, 2008; #767]

“We knew we had to have the support of migrant women, of the union, and of the community or we couldn’t win”, Robynne Murphy, from the Jobs for Women campaign (JFWC), told a September 11 forum organised by *Green Left Weekly* and the Socialist Alliance.

JFWC broke through the men-only employment policy of the “Big Australian” — BHP — and set an important precedent for jobs for women in traditional heavy industrial areas of the workforce.

JFWC, which was initiated by members of the Socialist Workers Party (now Democratic Socialist Perspective), began in Wollongong in 1980, to win employment for women at the BHP steelworks. In April of that year, a claim was put before the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board. By July, there were 50-60 women involved in the claim.

The campaign was long, with a final court settlement only being won in 1995. During the struggle, especially in the early years, the women organised pickets, a tent embassy outside the Port Kembla

steelworks gates, circulated leaflets in six migrant languages and gained the support of the Federated Ironworkers Union and the majority of the male workers in the plant.

“It was an incredible experience, being applauded by so many men workers as they entered or left the site. We received 2000 signatures on our petition in one day during the campaign”, Murphy said.

In 1986, 34 women won \$1 million in an initial settlement. “We were reported on the

front page of many of the newspapers around the country”, Murphy said. JFWC then launched a class action for 800 women who had been unfairly denied jobs at BHP.

During the campaign, JFWC gained broad support from the union and labour movements locally and internationally, and from women’s organisations around Australia. “The campaign is now studied in a number of university history and law courses”, Murphy added.

“The lesson is that you must organise, whether within a union, or elsewhere, if you are going to win”, Murphy said. The JFWC was a landmark case in the history of both the women's liberation and trade union movements, she pointed out.

“We need to learn its lessons for many of the struggles faced by women and workers today.” ■

Venezuela: Right wing seeks to undermine elections

[November 15, 2008; #775]

By Jim McIlroy & Coral Wynter

CARACAS — Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has warned that the right-wing opposition in his country is planning destabilisation actions during the November 23 elections for state governors and mayors, according to the November 12 *Ultimas Noticias*.

Chavez said that the opposition is preparing “violent acts in November and December. This revolution is armed and the people are ready to defend the process. Make no mistake.”

Chavez was addressing a mass meeting in Caracas’s Teresa Carreno auditorium to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, whose government was overthrown in a US-backed coup in 1973.

Chavez also denounced US interference in the recent municipal elections in Nicaragua. “Shut up, Bush”, Chavez said, while expressing hope that US president-elect Barack Obama was “not going to follow the same old comedy” and would “take his proper place in history, forget about imperialism, about trampling all over the world bombing villages”.

Chavez said he hoped Obama would dedicate himself to forming “a government that would work in harmony with the rest of the world”.

Chavez had earlier denounced plans by the opposition to refuse to recognise the possible triumph of candidates of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in the crucial, oil-rich western state of Zulia, where right-wing leader Manuel Rosales is retiring

as governor.

Chavez claimed that “the unpatriotic Venezuelan bourgeoisie are going around making desperate moves, above all here in Zulia, where the continuity of their domination is in danger”, *Ultimas Noticias* reported.

“When support for [PSUV] candidate [Gian Carlo di Martino] keeps rising so strongly, they go around frightening people and saying that an electoral fraud is being prepared. Now they are preparing the ground to not recognise the possible victory of Di Martino, in order not to recognise the triumph of the Bolivarians”, Chavez added.

“They want to ignite the country again through provocations. They are going around looking for the military to stage another coup d’etat”, Chavez argued.

“They are going around looking for paramilitaries in Colombia to infiltrate our country with the intention of destabilising it.”

Chavez is leading a campaign of mass rallies and marches (caravanas) in support of PSUV candidates all around Venezuela. At large rallies of red-T-shirted supporters, Chavez has called for people to mobilise to vote on November 23, emphasising that “PSUV candidates are my candidates”.

According to the November 9 *Ultimas Noticias*, Chavez told a large crowd in Valencia the previous day: “We will not rest until we win. We will fight the battle to the end.”

Chavez has stressed the need to combat abstention by people who had overwhelmingly supported his government in the past, such as in December 2006 when

he was re-elected president with 63% of the vote.

One year later, a high level of abstention by Chavez supporters resulted in the narrow defeat of a referendum over proposed constitutional changes that aimed to dramatically deepen the revolutionary process.

Other rallies and meetings have expressed strong support for PSUV candidates. On November 8, a big public meeting of Latin American immigrants living in Venezuela, especially Colombians, enthusiastically endorsed the revolutionary process and the PSUV as a unifying force for the continent, according to the November 9 *Diario Vea*.

A mass meeting of “people of the third age” (retirees and the elderly) supported PSUV candidate for mayor of greater Caracas, Aristabulo Isturiz, on November 9, the following day’s *Diario Vea* reported.

Summing up the campaign, PSUV director Dario Vivas stated: “Now, the only thing discussion is how to mobilise the people: From door knocking to mass action, there are various ways of closing the campaign.”

[The election results were overall a victory for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which won 17 out of 23 governorships and 80% of mayoral races in the cities and towns.] ■

From the frontline

This collection of articles from *Green Left Weekly* (now *Green Left*) by veteran Australian socialist Jim McIlroy deal with the ongoing fight against capitalism and for radical social change. They span the period 1991 to 2008.

The articles range from reports on events, overviews of past political events, including experiences during the anti-Vietnam War movement, as well as some more reflective, theoretical pieces. A number of pieces by other authors review publications by Jim or interview him on topical issues.

While the collection is eclectic and varied, it seeks to present an insight into the life and work of one particular socialist activist in the struggle to build a new socialist movement in Australia over many years.

\$10

