

RED POLITICS

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of *Red Politics*.

Red Politics aims to:

- assist in the development of revolutionary theory and analysis;
- raise the level of discussion and debate on issues relevant to revolutionaries; and
- defend the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

Depending on contributions we aim to publish quarterly and eventually monthly. We will publish at least every six months.

The purpose of the journal is to act as a vehicle for discussion and debate rather than simply propaganda. We are keen to see our political opponents contribute. We will actively solicit replies to articles. Final drafts will be circulated so that replies can appear in the same issue. This is particularly important if we are to get discussions going at the beginning while publication is infrequent. Circulation of drafts and replies will be assisted by the use of email and postings on the Internet. (Write for our email address or wait for details in the next issue.)

While the journal is based in Australia, we intend our readership and contributors to be as international as possible.

In this issue

Most of the articles in this first issue either originally appeared in *Strange Times*¹ (now dormant) or have been sitting in the proverbial bottom draw. Their presence here provides a more permanent and accessible home and an opportunity for them to be the basis for discussion.

A number of the articles are directed at sacred cows of the left, viz, widely held views on the Gulf War, imperialism and Kerr's sacking of Whitlam. 'What we need is a Revolution' is a reprint of

1 *Strange Times* is a small circulation commentary sheet that was published from 1986 to 1988 and 1991 to early 1993.

a pamphlet that discusses the aims of the revolution and the lessons of past revolutions. 'Red and Green don't Mix' argues for a total repudiation of green politics. The two articles on Stalin and the Soviet bloc present a Maoist (and 'Stalinist') perspective on Soviet politics which sharply contrasts with more widely held but more easily refuted views on the left.

'Don't Vote' challenges the view that the Australian Labor Party is the lesser of two evils, and calls for an explicitly anti-Labor campaign. 'Some Questions' comments on the articles in this issue.

A subscription form is provided on page 60.

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Australia

WHAT WE NEED IS A REVOLUTION!¹

Just look at the conditions we live under!

- chronically high unemployment;
- a stagnant economy;
- declining real wages;
- long hours at jobs that are stunting and demeaning, with bosses breathing down our neck; and
- innumerable social ills such as neuroses, substance abuse and brutality arising from poverty and alienation.

- all These conditions are appalling and unnecessary. Changing them requires a revolution that replaces the present social system based on private ownership of economic resources with one based on collective ownership.

Eliminating unemployment

Attempts to solve the problem of unemployment by tinkering with the present system are futile. The cycle of booms and recessions is an unavoidable part of capitalism.

We need a revolutionary government that takes over private industry and uses control over its revenue to ensure sufficient spending to fully employ economic resources. This takeover would begin with existing large scale industry and eventually cover the entire economy.

Process of continuing revolution

With the capitalists deprived of power and ownership, a process of continuing revolution can begin which will eventually transform the nature of work, the purpose of production, and the average individual's position in society as a whole.

1 First published as a *Strange Times* pamphlet, August 1993.

Workers will come to control production rather than being controlled by it. They will change their work from a form of slavery into an activity that is satisfying and fully exercises their creative powers. It will become an end in itself rather than an irksome means to an income. At the same time the purpose of production will change from profit making to serving the common good. Also the average individual will become a part of the political, intellectual and cultural life of society, and cease to be an alienated outsider.

Transforming work

On coming to power a revolutionary government, together with a mass movement of workers, will undertake a number of immediate major changes to the nature of work. These include:

- security of employment;
- the elimination of petty bossing and authoritarianism;
- greater democratic involvement in workplace decisionmaking, and worker supervision and scrutiny of management decisions and actions;
- the reorganisation of work to provide greater variety and a more equitable sharing of the thinking and creating;
- shorter and more flexible working hours to fit in better with the rest of people's lives;
- more time for training and education; and
- an increase in the pace at which menial tasks are eliminated by new technology.

More fundamental changes in the nature of work will develop as the average worker acquires the skills and ability needed to perform work that is diverse, interesting and empowering. In particular these include organisation and communication skills, and technical and administrative knowledge.

The ground is being prepared for these changes even now under capitalism. The average worker is better educated than in the past; and the division of labour that confines people to narrow tasks is being undermined by new technologies. These have

eliminated many menial jobs and require a broad range of abilities based on a general education rather than the old narrow craft skills.

A critical feature of the transformation of work will be the elimination of the managerial hierarchy that we presently take for granted. A lot of what managers do stems from the fact that work is performed by alienated 'wages slaves'. This requires a hierarchy of petty bosses whose job it is to tell those beneath them what to do and to make sure they do it. These people are also responsible for ensuring that production processes are working smoothly and that the quality of output is up to standard.

To the extent that workers experience work as a something they want to do and are willing to use society's resources responsibly (as discussed below), the need for supervision vanishes. This changing attitude to work plus the acquisition of the requisite skills and abilities also means that they can take on the monitoring of processes they are involved in and of product quality.

Once the abilities are acquired and the division of labour eliminated, much of the intellectual labour that is monopolised by management such as the planning and organisation of production can become integrated into the activities of the average worker,

This process of changing the nature of work will be protracted and involve much trial and error. It will also require a struggle against conservative habits and those who actively oppose change.

Production for use rather than profit

The revolution will transform the purpose of production from profit to use. Resources will not only be fully employed, they will be used far more efficiently to meet people's needs. This will result from such factors as: the replacement of competition with coordination and cooperation; greater commitment to meeting consumer needs; an orientation towards consumption rather than accumulation; and the use of more efficient technology once there is no longer an average rate of profit pushing up the cost of machinery relative to that of labour.

While unemployment and the business cycle can be eliminated simply by government control over revenue, the development of a new impetus to production to replace the profit motive will depend both on the transformation of work into something people want to do for its own sake (as discussed above) and on the desire to serve the common good.

A new relationship to society and a change in human nature

This desire to serve the common good will result from a basic change in 'human nature' and the individual's relationship to society. This in turn will stem from both the new empowering role in production plus a fundamental change in all other areas of life which will see people becoming full participants in the political, intellectual and cultural life of society. While they were wage slaves this was not possible both because of their limited level of personal and intellectual development, and their subordinate mentality. And of course it was ruled out by elites maintaining a stranglehold on these areas of life. There will also be more leisure time to engage in these activities, both because of on-going increases in productivity and a greater freedom to choose shorter working hours than was the case under capitalism.

A better upbringing will be an important part of the individual's new relationship with society. Children will be surrounded by adults with healthier personalities and a greater range of abilities. They will no longer be segregated into schools, which sever the link between thinking and doing. Instead they will participate actively in production and in society.

Withering away of the state

The supreme reflection of the revolutionary transformation of society, and the individual's place in it, will be the withering away of the state. This will occur over a number of generations. With social ownership there will no longer be mountains of legislation relating to private property rights and the regulation of industry. Where rules and standards are needed they will be voluntarily agreed to without the sanctions of law. The economic and social development accompanying the revolution will create a global society, so there will be no national wars and no armies. Police forces will become a thing of the past. With people no longer

alienated from society and with an automatic right to a share of output, theft and misuse of property will be rare. For the same reasons anti-social and pathological behaviour will be far less common. Where somebody needs to be restrained this can be achieved through informal measures without a standing police force.

Drawing on past experience of revolution

Modern history has seen a number of working class revolutions. The main ones were the Paris Commune, and the Soviet and Chinese revolutions. Each took the struggle further than the previous one before being overcome by the strength of the counter-revolution and by unfavourable socio-economic conditions (particularly the backwardness of the countries involved). In the case of the Soviet and Chinese revolutions these defeats were inflicted by concealed reactionaries holding high office in the revolutionary government.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, capitalism was restored in the 1950s with the rise to power of Khrushchov. The conservative regimes established at that time are the ones we saw crumble a few years ago. Despite empty talk to the contrary, no one can seriously argue that these regimes were communist or that their demise represented the 'death of communism'. Revolutionaries welcome their overthrow – it has increased the pace of change in these countries and assists the eventual reemergence in them of revolutionary movements.

This past experience is not a reason to be pessimistic about the eventual victory of revolution. There is nothing surprising about long term historical processes meeting short term setbacks. Nothing in this world develops smoothly. Take for instance, the long and arduous transition from feudalism to modern capitalism. Feudal ideas and practices turned out to be very resilient indeed.

It also needs to be emphasised that these defeats were not the result of an inherent flaw in the revolutionary agenda. They were defeats of a fragile and immature process taking place under the unfavourable conditions of socio-economic backwardness and limited experience. They were not defeats of developed and robust communism.

Mainly through the work of Mao tsetung, the revolutionary movement has drawn the appropriate conclusions from the danger of capitalist restoration. Mao greatly developed our understanding of how socialism in its early period is still essentially a capitalist society. As he often pointed out there is inevitably a new bourgeoisie within the political leadership. These people do not want to push society forward; instead they want to preserve and even strengthen the capitalist aspects of the new society.

Mao discovered that the key to combating the capitalist roaders was to mobilise the people to struggle against them and push forward the process of revolutionary transformation - hence the Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This struggle affected every area of life, in particular the workplace, the communes, the schools and universities, and culture. Factories were reorganised so as to involve workers in decisionmaking. Measures were taken to reduce the division between mental and manual labour, and the initiative and enthusiasm of the average worker was tapped for the first time. Selection for university (a rare privilege in an underdeveloped country) was now based on evidence that the applicant would use her learning to serve the revolution rather than to become a career minded bureaucrat. Revolutionary plays, operas and other works of art were developed in the struggle against the conservative domination of culture.

Despite the eventual defeat of the Chinese revolution after his death in 1976, Mao left us with a better understanding of the problem of capitalist restoration and how to fight it.

Where to from here?

As economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate we are sure to see a resurgence of rebellion against capitalism. For the moment conditions are quiet and the immediate task ahead for revolutionaries is to introduce radical ideas into the public arena. This will provide the basis upon which to create a revolutionary movement and eventually a revolutionary party that will contend for power with the capitalists. Victory will depend on winning popular support and defeating conservative resistance.

The Australian revolution will be part of a world revolution. This country is very much part of the world at large and is subject to the same economic and political crises. Furthermore, a revolution could not succeed in Australia in isolation from a similar worldwide upheaval.

RED AND GREEN DON'T MIX¹

Red and green don't mix. However, this has not stopped a section of the moribund 'left' from hopping on the green bandwagon. In their case it is more a mix of pink and green, which gives you an equally revolting blend.

Red and green don't mix because they are polar opposites. Reds want to create a better society on the basis of the conditions created by modern industrial capitalism while greens want to retreat from those conditions. For reds, modern industrial society is creating the conditions for a future communist society, with bourgeois relations of production being the obstacle to its achievement. Greens on the other hand see modern industrial society as the problem and consider that the answer lies in retreating to some 'simpler' way of life.

According to the greenies, modern industry is too large and produces far too much. They think we need to go back to a way of living that is simpler both in terms of scale and complexity of activity and in terms of the range and quantities of goods that we produce.

Large scale industry is seen as inherently oppressive. The individual is just a small cog in a big machine. He or she can have no control in a large organisation because it requires hierarchical relations between people. With increasing scales of production workers lose all the old skills that made work to some extent fulfilling. In small organisations however the individual can retain control over their actions. Small is beautiful is their catch cry.

Greenies consider that production is excessive both in terms of people consuming goods they do not really need and in terms of environmental sustainability. According to this view we would be happier living more simply and it would be more environmentally viable. People engage in mindless consumerism because of advertising and to compensate for their otherwise empty lives. As for the level of production, resources are so scarce and the environmental impact of many of our production

¹ Originally published as 'Mix red and green and you get the colour of poo' in *Strange Times* No. 13 November 1991.

processes is so severe that we cannot sustain our present levels of economic activity.

So large scale modern industry is seen as an obstacle to a better world, and one that we have to dismantle. However, this is the exact opposite of the red position. According to the red view, by creating modern large scale industry, capitalism is laying the basis for a more advanced social system. And it is doing this in a number of ways.

Firstly, the concentration of economic activity into large industries means that ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few capitalists while the vast majority are dispossessed of the means of production. As a result the vast majority of people have no material interest in the continuation of the present capitalist system because they do not possess capital. On the other hand if production is small scale and ownership is dispersed there would be a lot more capitalists and small business operators and therefore a lot more people with a stake in the system.

Secondly modern industry is creating a level of material affluence that is absolutely necessary for a more advanced social system. It means freeing people from a life dominated by drudgery. And it means having the leisure time and resources to engage in creative and challenging activities. And this includes activities that have up until now been the exclusive domain of elites or ruling classes, in particular the political, cultural and intellectual life of society.

Another way that modern industry is laying the basis for a new social system is by creating a work force that is better educated and more wide ranging in its capabilities than the ill-educated and narrowly trained workers of the past. This means a work force that has the potential to organise production without bosses and without the narrow traditional division of labour that separates the conceptual and instrumental aspects of work and turns it into something boring and alienating. It also means a work force that is less tolerant of the authoritarian nature of the present-day work environment and therefore more likely to rebel against it.

From a red perspective the problem with the present day economy is not its bigness but rather the power relations between people that stems from the capitalist system of ownership. At the

same time small scale production is associated with sweat shops and with slave and feudal societies of the past that were even more oppressive than the present system.

Now let's look at the green argument that current levels of production are unsustainable. According to this view we are going to run out of resources and we will destroy the ecological systems that we need if we are to survive. The fear of resource scarcity is mainly based on the failure to understand that resources are not just a given stock. They are created by new production methods. For example, the iron ore deposits in Western Australia did not become natural resources until the development of modern open-cut methods of mining in the 1960s. And oil was not a resource until the invention of the internal combustion engine; before that it was considered a nuisance. The example of oil also highlights the role of substitution. Technologies employing either oil or coal developed at the end of the nineteenth century at a time when the main source of energy, fire wood, was being severely depleted. There had been a real concern at that time about the economy grinding to a halt because of a lack of fire wood.

To be gloomy about the future availability of natural resources you would need to show that this process of resource creation through technological change will fail us in the future. There is no sign of this occurring. On the contrary there are lots of new technologies on the horizon. For example, genetic engineering will create new ways of producing food and compensate for soil depletion. There is also the increasing efficiency with which we use resources.

As for industry's impact on the environment, one would need to be convinced that a shrinking economy would be better able to limit environmental impact than a developing one. However, there is a far more compelling case to be made that a modern developing economy can better manage environmental impact. Firstly there are more resources available to do so and secondly there are new technologies to clean up the environment and new ways of producing goods that have less environmental impact.

If these ideas on the environment and resource scarcity sound like conventional conservative views on the subject it is no coincidence. Reds agree with smug conservatives that there are no *physical* barriers to social progress; where they differ is

whether bourgeois property relations present *social* ones. Greenies and their brown 'left' mates think they are being terribly radical when they claim there are physical barriers. In fact they are being even more conservative than the conservatives.

THE SOVIET BLOC WAS CAPITALIST

Bill Patterson

One of the critical tasks in resurrecting revolutionary politics is to refute the generally accepted belief that the former Soviet Union and 'eastern bloc' were socialist. Both the 'left' and right espouse this view in order to discredit communism. It reveals a failure to understand what socialism is essentially about.

In this article I will argue that these regimes were capitalist and anti-communist in character and therefore communists have nothing to apologise for. They were regimes that supplanted a previous socialist one and restored capitalism. This occurred in the 1950s with the rise to power of Khrushchov.

The main difficulty people have in recognising the capitalist character of these regimes is that they continued to call themselves communists, and retained some of the institutional trappings associated with the earlier socialist period such as state ownership and the ruling 'communist' party. It was not a capitalist restoration based on privatising state enterprises or bringing back the stock exchange. It was a capitalism that slipped into the empty institutional shell of socialism.¹

There is nothing unusual about phoneys claiming to be communist, socialist or revolutionary. History is full of examples. In 1914 most Marxist parties in Europe betrayed the revolution by supporting their own governments in the world war. The Mensheviks, a faction in the Russian party, sided with the counter-revolution in the Russian civil war. Most of the Western Communist parties followed Khrushchov's lead and abandoned revolutionary politics. Locally we had the example of the Communist Party of Australia. It is extremely difficult to believe that this now defunct organisation once had some connection with communism.

¹ In China the restoration of capitalism after Mao's death was more obvious. Communes were scrapped, private industry was introduced on a massive scale and state enterprises underwent extensive market 'reforms'. Deng Xiaoping was the darling of the West and praised as a capitalist roader. It was only in 1989 when his fascism became particularly visible that they started calling him a communist.

So how do you look beneath the surface appearance and determine whether a country really is socialist? It is not all that difficult. You just look to see if there is a revolution going on. Socialism by its nature is a process of continuing revolution. The political seizure of power that we normally refer to as the revolution is actually only the first step.

After the seizure of power society is still essentially capitalist (or, even worse, semi-feudal in backward countries) and has a long way to go before it becomes essentially communist. In this early stage, the only reason for saying that society is anything more than capitalist is that there is a revolutionary state and a social movement struggling to transform these conditions. The transition is far more than simply the state taking over industry from the old capitalists. It requires a major transformation over a number of generations in how people think, their ways of doing things and their abilities.

We are looking at changes that cannot occur overnight. In particular, the average person cannot suddenly change from being a slave to being a self-empowered individual who has appropriated the full range of human abilities and can take on the activities that were previously the exclusive preserve of elite groups. They do not have the education or training; and there is still the problem of slavishness, lack of self-confidence and the small mindedness of people who are used to being subordinates. There is also the need to learn through a tortuous process of trial and error how to organise society without bosses and hierarchy. To put it graphically, it is not easy to soar like an eagle when you have spent your life confined to the chook pen.

So in the mean time the division of labour as we know it remains pretty much intact; elites still remain in politics, management, culture and academia; and significant differences in pay remain.

The process of transformation is a revolution, not a smooth evolution. It involves a class struggle because every attempt at change will be resisted by those who want to retain their privileged position.

It is worth noting that social change in the past required periods of transition. For example, the transition from feudalism to modern capitalist society took about 500 years. Fortunately the transition to communism will not take that long.

Soviet Union under Stalin

During the socialist period in the Soviet Union under Stalin there was a process of revolutionary change and struggle. The bourgeoisie were expropriated, agriculture collectivised and a new socialist administration created to replace the Czarist one.

Red terror was imposed against counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs and corrupt officials. And the general principles of Marxism-Leninism were upheld - quite an achievement when you look at the record of the left since.

While the rest of the world stagnated in depression and indulged in the dangerous game of appeasement, the Soviet Union underwent a massive program of industrialisation and preparation for war. This was followed by the bitter but victorious struggle against the Nazis.

There was nothing dull about the Stalin period! It did, however, have its major limitations. Extreme economic and social backwardness limited what was possible. Before a new society could be created a modern industry and agriculture had to be developed. And the average factory or cooperative worker was not a modern proletarian but a semi-literate peasant.

There were also serious flaws in Stalin's theory and practice. He failed to sufficiently mobilise and rely on the masses with the result the the revolution did not proceed as far as conditions allowed. He failed to properly distinguish between contradictions between the people and the enemy, and those between the people. With the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and kulaks (rich peasants) he mistakenly claimed that class struggle within the Soviet Union was over, except for a few isolated counter-revolutionaries.

After Stalin

After his death did the new leadership push the revolution forward from where Stalin had left off (including correcting his errors)? No, they put the revolution in reverse gear.

The legacies of capitalism were consolidated and expanded. One person management became firmly entrenched. Regulation of industry became ever more bureaucratic and the initiative and

enthusiasm of workers was stifled. Wage differentials were increased rather than reduced and membership of a well paid elite became the object to aspire to. The division of labour was left untouched; and involvement in social, political and cultural life was confined more than ever to a minority elite.

Collective ownership of the means of production became a farce. They were effectively private property as high officials employed them for their own benefit through bonuses, perks and simple corruption. Gross inefficiencies in the use of resources revealed a total lack of interest in employing them for the common good.

Bureaucrats and party members had no interest in transforming society. They were generally careerists intent on scrambling up the existing hierarchy for personal gain. With glasnost and perestroika and now Yeltsin it is good to see that the vast majority have stopped even pretending to be communists. The whole system, with its entrenched, traditional career structures and elitist education, reinforced the traditional social division of labour.

The concept of socialism was gutted of any real meaning. It was basically equated with economic development. The theory of productive forces reined supreme. The role for workers was to work hard, live their mundane lives, feel proud of Soviet economic progress and be grateful for the occasional extra crumb thrown their way. Any fundamental transformation was relegated to the distant future. This was Khrushchov's 'goulash communism'. To quote Mao - when the sputnik went up the red flag came down.

Even in purely economic terms this political course proved a total failure as the corruption of the system and military spending saw economic growth slow to a crawl during the 60s and 70s, and vanish in the 1980s.

In foreign policy the regime's reactionary features were first revealed through appeasement of western imperialism (Khrushchov's 'peaceful coexistence') and then through an imperialism of its own in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, together with massive arms expansion way in excess of defence needs.

The fact that these societies were not in transition to communism is also reflected in the fact that there was no mass movement in

society holding communist ideas and keen to struggle for social transformation. Any mass interest in communism disappeared long ago. This indifference was assisted by the ruling elite who made a bastardised form of Marxism into a state religion to legitimate their rule.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion consider these points:

(1) You cannot describe as socialist regimes run by reactionaries opposed to the tasks of socialism.

(2) You cannot describe a society as socialist when it is so bourgeois in nature that socialist institutions such as economic planning and the restriction of market relations act as a fetter to the proper functioning of the economy. Put simply, if the average manager is a self seeker and the average worker an alienated and demoralised wage slave the economy cannot do without markets and the profit motive. In their absence you have bureaucratic bungling, corruption and stagnation.

(3) You cannot describe regimes as socialist when their overthrow by bourgeois liberalism represents an economic and political advance. Of course saying this is not to deny that it would have been better if they had been overthrown by a communist movement. But no such movement exists and so the point is rather academic. And anyway the emergence of a revolutionary movement will be easier under the new conditions.

REFUTING 'ANTI-IMPERIALIST' MYTHS

A Review of Warren's *Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism*.

David McMullen

Bill Warren's book, *Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism*, performs a useful service by refuting much of the mythology that the left has embraced in the name of 'anti-imperialism'. On the other hand, he manages to create his own brand of confusion. He does this, firstly, by blaming Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* for many of the left's erroneous views. And secondly, he is so busy extolling the historical mission of capitalism, that no effort is devoted to discussing how capitalism is an obstacle to human development and is becoming increasingly obsolete. Despite these shortcomings it is the myth shattering quality of the book that predominates.

Warren begins by reminding us of the basics of a Marxist attitude to capitalism:

- (a) It is an advance in all respects on earlier forms of society.
- (b) It develops the productive forces and society generally, so creating the necessary material or objective conditions for future communist society. This development also generates the contradictions which lead to capitalism's revolutionary overthrow.

The following passage from the *Communist Manifesto* that Warren quotes (Warren 1980, p 11) says it all.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fact-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones becomes antiquated before they can ossify.

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life, and his relations with his kind. (Marx and Engels, 1968, pp 34-5.)

This approach to capitalism is at total variance to that prevailing in the 'left'. The usual practice is to bemoan the development of capitalist productive relations and productive forces, and to cherish the things that capitalism is destroying. A few examples might clarify this point.

(1) Increased economic concentration and the destruction of the petty bourgeoisie. A classic case of the left's response is its bemoaning such things as agribusiness, supermarkets and fastfood chains.

(2) The increasing internationalisation of capital and the division of labor, which increases human intercourse on a world scale and lays the basis for a global society. This is denounced for destroying our 'independence' and national 'heritage' and placing us at the mercy of the 'multinationals'.

(3) The destruction of cherished skills by new technologies (cherished, that is, by trendy left sociologists). To a Marxist, technological development is eliminating the technical division of labor which is the material basis of class society. In other words we are moving to a situation where you will have an educated and versatile workforce, on the one hand, and on the other hand, processes of production in which all types of activities can be performed equally by all members of the workforce.

(4) The erosion of traditional culture and social bonds. Traditional life tends to be romanticized, compared with soulless modern living. We have 'lost' something. On the other hand, to a Marxist the neuroses and instability of modern life are infinitely superior to the narrow mindless certainty and security of days gone by.

So given that capitalism is a social advance and creates the conditions for social revolution, how are we to view European colonial expansion into pre-capitalist societies?

Warren cites, by way of example, Marx's recognition of the historically progressive role of Britain's penetration of India.

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindoostan, was actuated by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner

of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution. (S. Avineri (ed.) pp 93-94.)

Not long afterwards, Marx wrote as follows:

England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia (S. Avineri (ed.) pp 132.)

On the destruction side, they broke up or seriously undermined much of the existing social fabric and pre-capitalist modes of production. On the construction side, political unity was greatly enhanced by the British sword (mainly in the hands of local recruits), telegraph and railways, and embryonic industrialization began to emerge.

It is appropriate that the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century have not simply been directed at expelling the foreign oppressor. Rarely was the struggle simply one of returning to the days before colonial rule. For example, the struggle for independence in India was not directed at restoring the Mogul empire and independence in Africa did not mean returning to tribal hunter gathering or slash and burn societies. In some cases such as in China the revolution was directed at the total destruction of the traditional conditions that predated colonialism such as the remnants of feudalism. Even where independence from colonialism was not accompanied by fundamental social revolutions, the essential aspect of decolonisation was the establishment of a modern state, and the first steps towards a modern economy.

In the case of Czarist Russia, the modern industrial sector, which spawned the proletariat in the two decades prior to 1914, was primarily the product of foreign investment. At no stage did the Bolsheviks target this foreign ownership as something to be abhorred, an interesting point in the light of the economic nationalist position adopted by most of the Australian left.

To quote Warren:

Between 1896 and 1900 a quarter of all new companies formed were foreign, and by 1900 foreign capital accounted for 28% of the

total. By 1914 the proportion had risen to 33%. Foreign capital controlled 45% of Russia's oil output, 54% of her iron output, 50% of her chemical industry, 74% of her coal output. More than half of the capital of the six leading banks of the country - themselves controlling nearly 60% of all banking capital and nearly half of all bank deposits - was foreign (Warren 1980, p 46.)

The position commonly adopted by the left is to deny that capitalism is fulfilling its historical function in the developing countries. We are told that capitalism is not developing the productive forces nor is it destroying pre-capitalist conditions. The LDCs are supposedly being 'under-developed' by the world capitalist system. A major part of *Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism* is devoted to refuting these views. The linchpin of these views is the modern theories of imperialism, dependency and underdevelopment. Typical of the theorists in this area are Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin.

We are told that the people of the Third World have been getting progressively worse off during the modern era (ie since the industrial revolution) and have generally experienced a socio-economic and cultural regression. Capitalism has developed, and continues to do so, in a contradictory fashion, which generates at the same time development in the 'centre' and underdevelopment in the 'periphery'.

The implications is that it is fruitless to expect underdeveloped countries to repeat the stages of economic growth passed through by modern developed capitalist economies, whose classical capitalist development arose out of pre-capitalist and feudal society. Hence, the historical role of capitalism in these countries is finished, or at a dead end. It is argued, moreover, that the achievement of political independence has not significantly improved prospects of development in the 'periphery'.

A number of arguments are put forward to support the above position. Warren picks out three as being particularly important.

(a) A drain of 'economic surplus' from 'periphery' to 'centre' is said to arise from the flow of profits from foreign investment in the periphery back to the metropolitan country, and from unequal exchange in trade.

Warren points out 'that for such a drain to retard economic development it must be an absolute drain not simply an unequal

'transaction' that nevertheless leaves both sides better off than before ...' For example, the comparison that people make between profit outflow and capital inflow tends to be very misleading. Surplus extraction under capitalism is not comparable to the plunder practiced by the empires of antiquity. Foreign investment creates the surplus (with the help of local labor of course) before it extracts it; and it does this by developing the productive forces. You can certainly criticise the form that foreign investment and trade take, and argue that Third World countries would gain if they were better organised. What you cannot argue is that the wealth of Third World countries is being depleted.

Closely related to this 'surplus drain' concept is the idea that developed countries are better off than others because they have more than their share of the world's resources. In other words the reason why we have better plumbing than people in Bangladesh is because we have more than our share of the world's supply of pipes and trained plumbers. Or to put it more generally, there is a fixed quantity of some substance called 'prosperity' and the more that goes to one lot of people the less there is for everybody else. There is a total failure to understand economic development as a process of economic accumulation. Its most negative effect is the implication that the interests of people in the developed and underdeveloped world are at loggerheads.

(b) The 'traditional' division of labor between 'centre' and 'periphery' countries whereby the former produces manufactured goods and the latter primary goods, is seen to be imposed on the 'periphery' by the 'centre', and is a source of its backwardness.

Warren argues that the validity of the argument rests on two assumptions, which he sets out to refute. These are first that there was a possible and desirable alternative line of development to primary-product, export-lead growth in the backward countries concerned; and second, that the initial emphasis on the export of primary products actually erected serious impediments to subsequent diversification, especially along the lines of industrialisation.

(c) Imperialism or 'centre'/'periphery' relations are said to encourage the preservation of precapitalist modes of production.

This is discussed at two levels. First, there is the case where capitalist production at one point encourages pre-capitalist production at another point (eg, cotton production based on slavery). Here Warren correctly argues that the destructive force of capitalist relations would far outweigh any conserving tendencies. Second, there is the claim that imperialism has tended to ally itself with local feudalism at the expense of progressive bourgeois forces. Warren replies that this is 'largely undercut by the almost universal willingness of feudal classes to transform themselves, at least partly, into capitalist industrialisers once conditions are ripe.' Where Warren falls short on this question is in failing to emphasise that a thoroughly bourgeois revolution would far more successfully unleash capitalist development.

At a more general and theoretical level Warren attacks dependency theory on a number of grounds.

To begin with it is a static view. While a change in form over time tends to be conceded, the possibility of declining dependency is precluded. Moreover, changes in the centres of power is inadequately allowed for.

The theory is ahistorical in that it assumes the following:

- (a) that there were latent suppressed historical alternatives to the development that actually took place;
- (b) that the failure of alternatives to materialise was primarily the result of external imposition (colonial policy).

The theory is metaphysical in that it basically explains social phenomenon in terms of external causes, rather than as an interaction of both internal and external factors. (Mao spoke of external factors as the conditions of change and internal factors as the basis of change.) Dependency theorists would, for example, explain a country's backwardness by the fact that foreign capital is only invested in 'enclaves' or cash crops. A more sensible approach would perhaps be to see cause and effect running the other way - because the country is backward these industries are the only opportunities for investment. The backwardness would then be explained essentially by internal factors, namely a social system and mode of production significantly inferior to, or historically less advanced than, capitalism in developed countries.

Dependency theory has a strong thread of nationalist utopia, which establishes a set of thoroughly dubious criteria of what is good and what is detrimental. The first 'blossoms' of bourgeois society are denounced simply as imperialist cultural penetration (coca cola culture) serving the interests of the 'multinationals' and reinforcing dependent status.

There is also the concept of 'articulated' economy. Every country has to have its own steel industry, for example. It is argued that if you do not have the full range of industries you are trapped into some narrow and enslaving international division of labor.

This last point touches on a major area of confusion, namely, the distinction between dependence and interdependence. Warren says:

Since national economies are becoming increasingly interdependent, the meaning of dependence is even more elusive, not to say mystical. (Warren, 1980, p 182)

In fact with the increasing importance of international trade and capital movement, it is often the case that dependence on trade and foreign investment is a sign of economic development.

The last section of Warren's book provides extensive evidence that considerable economic development has occurred in the Third World during the post-war period. It has been meteoric in comparison with that in western countries. The western countries took centuries to emerge from the Middle Ages and eventually achieve an 'industrial takeoff' in the nineteenth century.

On Lenin's views of imperialism

In Warren's opinion, the more recent theories of imperialism, such as underdevelopment and dependency are best regarded as post-war versions of the views expressed by Lenin in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, or at any rate stemming, or continuing, from where he left off. Warren also claimed that in this book Lenin was espousing views that were at variance with his earlier writings on the Narodniks and the role of capitalist development in Russia.

Here Warren is skating on thin ice. Much of his case rests on Lenin's use of particular words, especially 'moribund', 'stagnant' and 'parasitic'. By 'moribund', Lenin is referring to the increasing obsolescence of capitalism, exemplified most starkly by two world wars and economic crises of the sort that hit in the 1930s and will hit again in the future. He is not saying that social and economic development ceases. In his use of the word 'stagnation', Lenin is not saying that capitalism is no longer revolutionising the productive forces - a proposition that would obviously be wrong. He is referring to its increasing tardiness relative to a communist organisation of production - the productive forces are outgrowing the capitalist mode of production. Warren tries to equate Lenin's description of monopoly capital and imperialist countries as parasitic with the crude 'surplus drain' view. However, Lenin is not denying that the export of capital develops the productive forces in recipient countries; he is just saying that the centralisation in the ownership of capital shows up geographically. Places such as London and New York have a far higher than average proportion of the world's bloodsuckers; they tend to be richer and their 'portfolios' span the world. When Lenin explicitly discusses the impact of imperialism on the then colonies, he says that it was developing the productive forces. Warren unjustifiably shrugs this off as lip service to Marxist orthodoxy.

Warren had a number of other criticisms of Lenin's position. However, they are not central to our present discussion. He claims (a) that capital exports have not increased in significance, (b) that Lenin espoused underconsumptionism and (c) that inter-imperialist rivalry was based on trade rather than competing capital. These and other issues could perhaps be looked at on some other occasion in a fuller discussion of Lenin's book.

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THE KERR COUP - ANOTHER MYTH¹

The recent death of former Governor-General John Kerr is a good excuse to look back over the way the left reacted to his sacking of Whitlam. It is a remarkable example of how people who claimed to be radical leftists could tie themselves to the coat tails of the Laborites. They convinced themselves of all sorts of conspiracy theories about CIA involvement and described the sacking as a semi-fascist coup – a case of the ruling class abandoning parliamentary institutions. The left's analysis of the Whitlam sacking is second only to its stance on the Gulf War as an example of its cretinism.

Essentially all Kerr did was to force the most unpopular government in Australian history to face the electorate. According to the left this was all terribly fascist because the government's unpopularity was due to a malicious media campaign engineered by the media barons and multinationals. However, given the ability of the Whitlam government to shoot itself in the foot every other week, it would have required the media to be actively biased in its favour for it not to show the government in a bad light. It was also the time of the worst world economic downturn since the depression of the 1930s and for that reason alone very few elected governments anywhere in the world survived the mid 1970s.

The left was also outraged at the Liberal's blocking supply in the Senate. The Labor Government liked to describe the House of Representatives as the 'people's house' and to claim that it was being defied by the Senate which is elected on a less representative basis. This is a funny argument given that Fraser's main interest was in getting an election for the lower house, so that 'the people could decide'. It was Labour that was keen to avoid that at all

¹ Originally published in *Strange Times*, No.10 April 1991. This article was written well before Keating launched his 'republican debate'. On 11 November 1975 the Australian Governor General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, on the grounds that he was unable to get the budget through the opposition dominated upper house (the Senate). Kerr then appointed the opposition leader Malcom Fraser caretaker Prime Minister and called an election. Fraser subsequently won the election in a landslide.

costs. They had schemes for calling half senate elections, anything but an election over who was to govern.

Certainly the royalist institution of Governor-General should be replaced by a president, but that is another issue. Hopefully the appointment to the position of a republican and atheist in the person of Bill Hayden will do much to hasten its demise.

THE LEFT AND THE GULF WAR

Tom Saunders

During the Gulf War the pseudo left gave one of the most spectacular displays of its ability to get things wrong. They thought they were on a winner. Here was a chance to relive the Vietnam antiwar movement. But of course that fell flat when the Americans creamed the Iraqis in a matter of weeks, with the minimum of US body bags.

A number of reasons were put forward for opposing UN action to boot Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait.

To begin with much was made of US hypocrisy. Obviously, talk of defending Kuwait from aggression is pukemaking when it comes from the mouths of those responsible for aggression in Vietnam and more recently in Grenada and Panama. It also rings hollow when you consider the cases where the US has turned a blind eye to other countries aggression, eg, in East Timor and Palestine.

However, the trouble with opposing US action on the basis of hypocrisy is that you end up being hypocritical yourself. While calling for international action against Indonesian or Israeli aggression you fail to do so in the case of Iraq. Some 'peace movement' people tried to disguise their hypocrisy by talking about how horrible the regime was in Kuwait, how the country was just an artificial creation of colonialism or how it had provoked Iraqi action by nicking its oil from border wells. But of course these arguments are silly. Iraq's aggression was against the people of Kuwait and not just the government – they were murdered, tyrannised and their economy wrecked and plundered. Among those most severely affected were the immigrant workers who were forced to flee the country. About half the countries in the world are 'artificial creations of colonialism'. So does that mean that aggression against any of them is OK? And abolishing the border is a curious way to resolve a border dispute.

The USA and other powers have been accused of being hypocrites because they helped to arm Iraq in the past. In the case of the Americans military assistance was minimal. But to the extent that it is true it would seem to be an argument for insisting that

those responsible help clean up the mess they helped create. You could draw a parallel with World War II in Europe. The fact that the Nazi monster was able to unleash its aggression was very much due to the follies of French and British foreign and defence policies in the prewar years.

We are also told that the war was not about liberating Kuwait. It was about protecting oil supplies, dismembering Iraq and supporting Israel. It is probably true that if Kuwait had exported broccoli rather than oil the Americans would have done nothing. The Americans obviously did not see it as in their national interest for a large proportion of the world's oil supply to be in the hands of a character like Saddam Hussein. (It is a feeling that most people with a motor vehicle can share.) And also they could not allow their national interest to be seriously stomped on because of the wider implications for their position in the world. But having said this, all you can conclude is that the Kuwaitis are lucky that they export oil rather than broccoli, and that we should demand collective security for all countries regardless of their strategic importance to major powers.

There was some talk at the time about the USA having plans to dismember Iraq. This of course proved to be untrue.

However, this did not deter our intellectually flexible peace warriors. They switched to denouncing the Americans for wanting to bolster the Iraqi regime against the spread of Iranian influences in the Shiite regions, and for being more concerned about their relations with the Turks than they were about the rights of Kurds in northern Iraq. The Yanks can't win!

As for any assistance to Israel from this whole affair, it mainly came from Saddam Hussein. It was he who delivered them the sympathy vote with his scuds. He also detracted attention from the Intifada and provided the Palestinians with a chance to shoot themselves in the foot by supporting him. They have a bad habit of looking to 'strong leaders' to restore Arab dignity.

We were constantly told that war was not necessary, that there could have been a negotiated settlement. Negotiations about what? The whole world demanded that Iraq get out of Kuwait. All that remained was for them to do it.

Talks for the sake of it prior to the fighting would simply have delayed conflict, while talks accompanied by a ceasefire once the

shooting had started would simply have protracted the war by allowing the Iraqis to regroup and resupply their forces.

Some people wanted to negotiate a face saver for Saddam Hussein such as an oil well or an island or two, or making it look as if his withdrawal from Kuwait was linked to a conference on the Palestinian problem. But this scenario (assuming Saddam was interested) would still have to be underpinned by the threat of military action, be it the continuation of the blockade or some stronger measure. Face savers are to make it easier for someone to back down when threatened with military force. If there is no military pressure there is no need to back down and face saving ceases to be an issue.

Of course, the 'peace movement' opposed the blockade or any other military pressure. However, this did not stop some hypocrites who opposed the naval blockade, from breast beating about how it had not been given time to work, once the shooting started.

But why reward aggression through a facesaver? It would only have encouraged further aggression down the track once the Americans had packed up and gone home.

Then there were the proponents of the the most abject pacifism who say that going to war is just bad – 'fighting for peace is like fucking for virginity' to quote their terribly clever catchcry. In fact attempts to avoid war can actually promote it. It sends a message to aggressors that their aggression will be unanswered. Hence it encourages war at two points – it encourages the initial act of aggression and it encourages further ones that lead to a bigger war than would have resulted from resisting the initial aggression in the first place.

Saddam Hussein would not have invaded Kuwait if he had foreseen the response. His perception was that the other Arab countries did not have the strength to react and that the only power outside the region strong enough to take action, namely the US, did not have the stomach for it. This conclusion about the USA is understandable given its obvious decline during the 70s and 80s when it proved to be a paper tiger.

If the world had stood idly by, Saddam Hussein would have eventually invaded Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. Military intervention would then have to be bigger and bloodier

than if Saddam had been nipped in the bud. He would have declared himself the saviour of the Arab nation. Of course his actions would actually be a blow against Arab unity, as Saudis would be sure to resent being ruled by Iraqi thugs and the Syrians would feel the need to prepare to fend off their Iraqi 'brothers'.

The left (and George Bush) believed that the victory in the Gulf brought an end to the Vietnam syndrome. If anything, the US has actually reduced its ability to move independently in military matters in the future. The diplomacy that preceded the armed conflict has created an expectation that such matters should get the nod from the UN or at least the support of a large number of countries. Also the constant talk about Iraqi aggression and the sanctity of national sovereignty will make US aggression politically harder not easier. Furthermore the Gulf war reveals America's decline as a world power – they felt they had to muster international public opinion before they could act and they had to rely heavily on Saudi Arabia and Japan for funding.

It should also be kept in mind that the U.S. military still has a publicly stated 'Vietnam syndrome' policy of only intervening where they are sure of a quick victory and minimum casualties.

Finally we must not forget that the left has a 'thing' about the Americans. This affects its thinking on many questions, the Gulf War included. The Americans are seen as the source of all evil in the world. The USA is the headquarters of 'imperialism' – a notion that has lost its original scientific meaning and is now closer to the Ayatollah's 'Great Satan'.

THE ISO ON STALIN – A CRITIQUE¹

In keeping with *Strange Times*' policy of bucketing nonsense from the pseudo left, this issue is devoted to examining a central dogma of the International Socialist Organisation, namely that relating to Stalin's Russia. While the discussion does have a wider relevance to the extent that it relates to the whole issue of what went right and wrong in the Soviet Union and the nature of socialist revolution, the primary aim is simply to show once again how the ISO is not up to scratch in the ideas department.

When you first start reading stuff by the ISO (or the Socialist Workers Party in Britain) on the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 30s you feel there must be something you've missed, that the apparent stupidity has to be deceptive. However, it does not take long to realise that no deception is involved. It really is genuinely silly. The silliness can be divided into two categories – those they share with other trotskyite groups and those which are uniquely their own.

What they share with other trots is the habit of holding two mutually exclusive views at the same time. They claim in the same breath that Stalin betrayed the Russian revolution and that socialism in Russia in the absence of a revolution in Europe was impossible. They pull a similar stunt with Stalin's foreign policy. On the one hand they claim that Stalin let revolution abroad go hang and geared his foreign policy to the narrow priority of preserving (and expanding) his own regime. On the other hand they admit that after about 1922, revolution in the capitalist countries was no longer an issue – capitalism had stabilised. In other words by the time Stalin came to power there was no longer a revolution abroad for him to sabotage or neglect.

Underlying all this muddle is the fact that the main problem for trotskyites is their distaste for the situation the Soviet Union found itself in rather than Stalin's program for dealing with it. This is manifested in the fact that they had no alternative except heroically launching forth to support some non-existent revolution in Europe. They were not prepared to accept as socialist or progressive the measures necessary to ensure

1 Originally published as 'Not the 1917 news' in *Strange Times* No.16 April 1992.

economic and social development in Russia. It also shows up in the fact they can't quite sort out whether they are claiming that Stalin was the cause of the degeneration or whether he was simply a response to conditions that shouldn't have been – reality was unfair!

Quite often Stalin is denounced for doing what was obviously necessary given the conditions. Like a child throwing a tantrum, they denounce reality for being wrong; it shouldn't have been like that. The following quote is a classic example of this. (It is taken from an article by Binns in *Education and the Modern World*, Socialist Workers Party, London 1987, page 14.)

The extreme backwardness of Russia in an age of imperialism forced it to industrialise rapidly. If the revolutions in Germany and elsewhere had succeeded in the early 1920s, plenty of means of production and skilled labour could have flowed into Russia [?!] to accomplish this task. But when the perspective changed, from stressing the need to spread the revolution internationally to stressing the building of 'socialism' in a single country, as was proposed by Stalin in 1924, the situation was completely reversed. If industrialisation was to take place in Russia in isolation, this could only be by forcing many of these peasants off the land into the mines and steel mills.

Notice how a change in reality – the defeat of the revolution in Europe – is transformed into a devilish change of perspective by Stalin!

Where the ISO differs from other trotskyite groups is in their characterisation of the Stalin regime as state capitalist rather than as a 'deformed workers state'. The post-Stalin regimes are similarly characterised because they were seen as a straight continuation of the earlier regime in all essential respects.

According to the ISO the Soviet Union was capitalist under Stalin because the aim of production was accumulation and this is what distinguishes capitalism from socialism or communism. Under the latter on the other hand production is to meet people's needs.

Binns explains why capitalists accumulate as follows:

The drive for accumulation as a means to still greater accumulation, which is the essence of capitalism, is due to two main factors. Firstly, workers are separated from the means of production. If they controlled production as a whole, it would be

subordinated to use, to consumption. In so far as they decided to accumulate, it would only be as a means for the further end of consumption. Secondly, there is competition between the capitalists. Without it each capitalist could decide freely whether to consume the surplus products, to accumulate it, or even to return it to the workers who created it. It is competition which makes him accumulate and it does so by threatening him with extinction by rival capitalists if he doesn't. That is why 'competition makes the imminent laws of capitalist production to be felt by each individual capitalist, as external coercive laws' [Marx in Capital, volume 1].

This is not bad as an explanation of why there is accumulation for its own sake under capitalism. However, the attempt by Binns and his confreres to characterise the crash industrialisation of the 1930s in Russia as capitalist accumulation is misconceived. They make their case on the basis that the two conditions applied: workers were separated from the means of production and competition still existed through military or strategic competition with the West. Let's examine these in turn.

Binns tells us that Stalin took away workers control over the means of production. "The last remnants of workers' control over production, the 'Troika', was abolished in 1929. In its place stepped the manager whose orders were to be unconditionally binding on his subordinate administrative staff and on all workers."

The first point to make here is that even if you had all the troikas and workers' councils that your heart desired worker appropriation of the means of production is always going to be very limited during the early phases of socialism, particularly in an economically backward country. Appropriation is not essentially a question of establishing a set of formal institutions. Rather it is bound up with the abolition of the division of labour which is a process requiring an entire historical epoch. For the individual worker a prerequisite for work being a controlling rather than controlled experience is the acquisition of the higher skills and abilities associated with organisation, communication and design. This would only be fully achieved with the transition from socialism to communism. In the Russia of the 1920s and 30s when the average worker was an illiterate ex-peasant, it was unavoidable that production was run by a caste of engineers and managers. In fact because of this backwardness, production

organisation would in some respects need to be more hierarchical than it is in present day capitalist industry.

You can argue about whether Stalin could have taken things further, however, the extent of repossession would still be severely limited.

Now how does Binns show that the crash industrialisation of the 1930s was driven by capitalist accumulation? While the forms of competition we generally associate with the drive to accumulate are absent there is a new form – strategic or military competition with the West.

The bureaucracy's monopoly of foreign trade enabled it to seal off Russia from *price* competition. But *strategic* and *military* competition completely dominated the process of capital formation in Russia from the moment accumulation became the bureaucracy's central concern in 1928. From the beginning of the Five-Year Plans armaments dominated the accumulation process. For instance in machine-building plants, which are probably the best gauge of the development of accumulation, already by 1932 munitions plants accounted for as much as 46 per cent of the total iron and steel consumed. By 1938 this figure had risen to a staggering 94 per cent, and virtually all other machinery plant construction had ceased. Accumulation in the period before the outbreak of the Second World War, in 1939, was dominated by strategic and military competition with the Western nations.

The remark about 'price competition' is muddled. In the home market the Soviet government sealed off *all* competition, price or non-price. As for exports, the kind and level of competition faced would vary with the market conditions for each good and this was beyond the control of the Soviet government.

This notion of military or strategic competition being a form of capitalist competition is mumbo-jumbo. It is market competition that underlies capitalist accumulation – the protection of the exchange value of capital in the face of the threat from competing capitals. We are not talking about any old competition – for example, there has been military competition throughout history but it was not capitalist competition.

Certainly military power can be used to defend or expand a country's markets and to destroy the market power of others.

However, in this role it is a weapon or adjunct of capitalist competition but not the thing itself.

So given that the only field where the Soviet economy was in competition was in its export markets, you would have to show that its military power was being used, or about to be used, as a weapon in that competition. This of course is nonsense. It was a backward country with limited connections with the rest of the world economy and minimal reliance on export earnings. Its ability to industrialise during the 1930s while the capitalist world stagnated in depression is an indicator of how limited its reliance on external trade really was.

The policy of industrialisation and arms build up in the 1930s tells you nothing about whether the Soviet Union was or was not socialist. Just as capitalism develops modern industry, you would also expect a revolutionary government in a backward country like Russia to undertake a program of industrialisation because modern industry is a prerequisite for socialism and communism. As for emphasising military production, Nazi aggression confirmed the wisdom of this policy. Why does preparing for the inevitable Nazi onslaught rate as capitalist accumulation? It is what any self-respecting revolutionary government would have done. You would expect a revolutionary regime to 'compete' militarily with a hostile capitalist world.

OK the ISO's case for characterising Stalin's regime as state capitalist is unsatisfactory but are they still right even for the wrong reasons?

They are at least half right in that socialism itself is a form of capitalism, a form presided over by a revolutionary government that leads a protracted struggle to transform society from capitalism to communism. Furthermore, in the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks had the even more rudimentary task of converting a country of illiterate peasants into a country of unskilled and semi-skilled factory workers. In other words the task of revolutionaries in Russia was basically to create capitalism. The extent that the capitalist stage could be jumped was constrained by the limited scope for eliminating the division of labour.

However, having said this the regime was socialist in the sense that it generally speaking did everything revolutionaries could be expected to do in the conditions in which they found themselves

and given the level of understanding and limited experience at the time. In particular it expropriated the bourgeoisie and collectivised agriculture. This enabled the Soviet Union to rapidly industrialise while the capitalist world was in depression and provided a socialist economic base which was a prerequisite for more fundamental changes in relations between people at work and in society generally.

The capitalist label appears much more appropriate for the post-Stalin period. While the Stalin period was essentially one of dramatic revolutionary change, the subsequent Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods were characterised by stagnation and conservatism. There was no ongoing radical change but rather an entrenchment of the division of labour and the private expropriation of resources by a minority by every conceivable legal or illegal means. In this way socialists property forms became an empty shell and in fact a fetter to the proper working of capitalism which required the full development of bourgeois property rights. In this sense the Soviet Union had become totally capitalist.

Weren't there better alternatives to Stalin? Not really. He was the best of a generally poor lot. Lenin (who died in 1924) was the only one who gave strong leadership in ideas and action. There was nothing exulted about the 'Bolshevik Old Guard' that Stalin purged and their policies were moronic and would have lead to failure. Stalin on the other hand was prepared to take the necessary hard decisions on collectivisation of agriculture and industrialisation.

For those who are not radically inclined there was of course the non-socialist alternative. However, that alternative was not liberal democracy but a fascist White regime.

DON'T VOTE

Paper for Victorian CAPU Conference, 'JUSTICE UNDER LABOR' May 10, 1986

Albert Langer

The words underlined were so highlighted in a copy of this paper tendered to the Supreme Court of Victoria by the Australian Electoral Commission as 'exhibit REM-1' in support of restraining orders to suppress the proposed campaign. Presumably the AEC was especially concerned at the threat to 'marginal ALP held seats'. (25 June 1987, proceedings number 2335).

Introduction

A 'Don't Vote' campaign is being launched with the declared aim of bringing down the Labor Government. This is primarily an electoral tactic and does not claim to solve any wider strategic problem than what to do at election time. This electoral tactic obviously contradicts the tactic of joining the ALP and fighting to make it more left wing, although many who have joined the ALP and have fought to make it more left wing may find themselves attracted to it. The 'don't vote' tactic also partly contradicts and partly overlaps with the tactic of running alternative candidates.

The problem we face is that views to the left of the ALP Government are at present completely marginal and irrelevant in Australian politics. We can say what we like, but nobody really needs to listen. This is not the result of any conspiracy by our opponents, but reflects the overall bankruptcy of 'left' ideologies, not only in Australia, but throughout the western world. We do not at present have any clear vision of what kind of society we want, let alone a strategy for getting there. Nor do we even have any adequate analysis of the society we are living in or the forces at work within it. That necessarily leaves us in a passive position where we cannot take any significant positive initiatives.

This means that leaving aside the fake left, or 'pinks', who participate in mainstream politics as liberals or conservatives, the left currently has no role in mainstream politics. Our political

discussions generally revolve around what stand to take, rather than how to achieve any concrete political objective. We are engaged in propaganda, and rather dull propaganda at that, rather than politics. That problem cannot be resolved by any electoral tactic, including a 'Don't Vote' campaign. But any electoral tactic we do adopt should at least start from a recognition of the real situation and contribute towards ending that situation. As a minimum, it should aim to achieve some concrete political objective that furthers the goal of establishing the left as an independent political force able to influence mainstream politics in accordance with its own program and strategy.

The concrete political objective of a 'Don't Vote' campaign, is to bring down the present ALP Government, which in practice means replacing it with a Liberal or Liberal/National Coalition Government. It is not a 'protest' vote and would not be aimed at Labor party strongholds. It would be concentrated in marginal Labor held seats and the measure of its success would be the number of seats that it cost the ALP.

That is clearly a concrete political objective, but is it feasible, and would it further the goal of establishing the left as an independent force able to influence mainstream politics in accordance with its own program and strategy? How on earth could the election of an even more reactionary Government than the ALP actually benefit the left?

Before considering that in detail, let us examine the main alternative proposals.

Joining The ALP

The tactic of joining the ALP presumably has as its concrete political objective, turning the ALP into a substantially different kind of political party, which would then implement left policies. An obvious problem is that this tactic has been tried many times before and is still being tried now, with no signs of success. Even the more limited objective of splitting the ALP to provide a substantial base for a new party has got precisely nowhere.

The repeated failure of this tactic is not accidental and is not the result of too few people giving it a try. The tactic has failed in the past, is failing now, and will fail in the future, because it does not

recognise reality, although its advocates often claim to be more 'practical' than others on the left.

The reality is that the ALP is and always has been a liberal capitalist party. People join it and vote for it because they believe, and correctly believe, that social progress is possible within the present capitalist social system and that the ALP is more liberal and progressive than its conservative opponents. The ALP is not 'betraying' its socialist principles, it never had any. If the ALP is now becoming a conservative party rather than a liberal and progressive party, that is a problem for its liberal and progressive supporters, a problem for the 'pinks', not a problem for the left.

In a bourgeois democratic society, progressive liberals have a perfect right to form progressive liberal parties, just as conservatives have a perfect right to form conservative parties. It is fundamentally undemocratic and elitist for people who claim to be on the left to try and take over the political party of an entirely different political tendency. Genuine ALP supporters naturally resent these attempts at manipulation and defend their party and its liberal capitalist principles against alien intruders.

The result is a massive diversion of energy with people who claim to be on the left actually spending all their time 'getting the numbers' at meetings attended only by themselves and their opponents, instead of engaging in real politics out among the people. In many respects the ALP is not really a political party, because it does not go out to the people and try to win them to its principles. It is just an electoral machine striving to 'get the numbers' at election time. But this applies even more to the ALP left than to the party generally. While many in the ALP left are also involved in social movements outside the ALP, their participation in the ALP does not strengthen that. It provides another, more comfortable world, where getting some resolution adopted or defeated in some party organisation, or taking a 'principled' stand against their opponents who win the numbers, makes it easier to avoid facing up to the fact that they are unable to actually convince anybody inside or outside that world to change their views about anything.

Given the absence of any organised left movement with a real mass base at present, it may not be surprising that the ALP left finds their world more comfortable than the bitter recognition of the left's isolation and impotence. But it remains an entirely

unreal world completely divorced from real struggle and real politics.

If by some miracle the ALP left was one day to actually 'get the numbers', the only result would be that genuine ALP supporters would regroup in a different organisation with the same mass base. More likely if there was the slightest danger of a 'left' takeover, there would be a development like the formation of the Social-Democratic Party in Britain, and consequent return of the British Labour Party towards its traditional liberal progressive or 'Laborist' principles.

The point is that people are not so stupid as the ALP left imagines. ALP voters do not support their party out of blind organisational loyalty but because they agree with it, or at least prefer it to its opponents. When the left does develop a vision of the kind of society it wants, its strategy must be based on winning people to that vision through their own experience of struggle. The sort of social change we want requires a high level of consciousness from large masses of people who will transform society while transforming themselves. It can only be achieved if that consciousness is raised, not by taking over organisations that reflect their existing level of consciousness.

If any sort of social change could be achieved by infiltrating and taking over an existing mainstream party, it would not be a progressive change but a victory for manipulation by bureaucratic manipulators.

Running Alternative Candidates

Undoubtedly there will be more alternative candidates at future elections, whether there is also a 'Don't Vote' campaign or not. In the medium term we can expect the eventual formation of a new mainstream party as far to the left of the ALP as the Australia Party or even the Liberal Party is to its right, which is not all that far. Perhaps it will be something like the 'Greens' in West Germany or perhaps it will result from a split with conservatives in the ALP.

This could be of some benefit in opening up the political situation and setting the stage for greater instability and further developments. But running candidates or forming new parties could not at present further the goal of establishing the left as an

independent political force able to influence mainstream politics in accordance with its own program and strategy.

This is because the crisis of the left is a crisis of reformism and any new political party or tendency formed now could only be a reformist party or tendency, not a revolutionary one. It would not be an independent political force with its own program and strategy and it would have little influence on mainstream politics.

Reformism, as opposed to liberalism, asserts that social progress within capitalism is not enough, and the capitalist system itself must be transformed, legally, gradually and peacefully, into some sort of socialist system not based on wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production.

The reason liberal parties like the ALP, the U.S. Democratic Party and the various European Social-Democratic parties are strong, while reformist parties are weak or non-existent, is that reformism is not a realistic, practical prospect in advanced capitalist societies, while liberalism, like conservatism, is perfectly realistic and practical. Historically, reformism has capitulated to liberalism and any new reformist tendency would have to do the same. The Democratic Party is supported by reformists in the U.S.A. for much the same reasons that the ALP is supported by reformists in Australia – reformism has been unable to sustain an electorally significant party of its own.

The problems we face in advanced capitalist societies all revolve around the fact that they are advanced capitalist societies. It is the mode of production based on private property and wage labor that has to be changed and that requires a social revolution in which the class that produces the wealth seizes power and uses that power to take the wealth from those that own it and to abolish wage labor. Taking the wealth from those that own it is not something that can be achieved peacefully and legally through such measures as taxation and nationalization. Taking people's property is stealing, which is a very serious crime. They would certainly call the police and if it was happening on a large scale or with Government connivance they would call the army. After all, what are the police and the army for if they are not to prevent wholesale stealing of private property?

As long as a minority ruling class owns the means of production, infringement of its property rights can only result in the economy

jamming up and going into deeper crisis – if such attempts are not treated as criminal and suppressed by armed force as in Chile. The ‘property question’ is not on the agenda in mainstream politics precisely because deep down people know that it cannot be resolved peacefully, gradually and legally. That is why reformist parties attract little support and an important reason why the left, which has not advanced beyond reformism, has basically gone from crisis to collapse.

Of course at present revolution is just as unrealistic and impractical as reformism, and revolutionary ideas have even less support than reformist ideas. But that simply confirms that any new party or tendency that could be formed now would not be revolutionary. It does not prove that revolution will remain impractical and unrealistic as the crisis of capitalism deepens and the currently dominant political forces exhaust their potential.

When we do have a clear vision of the kind of society we want and a strategy for getting there, it will have to be a revolutionary vision and a revolutionary strategy. When a revolutionary party is eventually formed it will certainly need to be involved in electoral tactics as in every other arena of struggle. But every previous attempt to establish a revolutionary party in an advanced capitalist society has failed, and in particular those parties that have developed successful electoral tactics have without exception ceased to be revolutionary. Nobody is seriously attempting to establish a revolutionary party in Australia at present and those that pretend to be are just posturing.

Meanwhile running alternative candidates without a revolutionary party will not achieve any worthwhile political objective because it avoids facing up to the fact that we don’t have a vision and don’t have a strategy. Whatever platforms the alternative candidates run on, nobody will seriously believe, including the candidates themselves, that society really could be transformed according to their platforms. They will simply be another form of protest propoganda rather than a serious political intervention aimed at a concrete practical objective.

To the extent that alternative candidates withhold their preferences from the ALP, their campaign will overlap with the ‘Don’t Vote’ campaign and contribute to the same practical political objective – bringing down the ALP Government and replacing it with a Liberal/National Government. To this extent

they will be open to exactly the same objections from ALP supporters as the 'Don't Vote' campaign itself – namely that the opposition is worse than the Government and they are helping it to get in.

But they will have less impact in overcoming these objections than the 'Don't Vote' campaign because they will tend to be campaigning for the quite unrealistic prospect of electing the alternative candidates, rather than for the more controversial, but also more practical objective of bringing down the ALP Government, and will therefore not be answering the doubts of their potential supporters. Moreover most alternative candidates will tend to run in Labor strongholds or for the Senate as a 'protest' vote rather than in marginal electorates where they could actually cost the ALP some seats.

To the extent that alternative candidates direct their preferences to the ALP, or fail to direct them away from it, their only impact on the actual results of the election will be to confirm the ALP in office. Without actually campaigning to bring the ALP down, people who believe the ALP is better than the Opposition will continue to give their preferences to the ALP whether they 'protest' or not. Thus alternative candidates will not establish a force politically independent of the ALP, but will confirm again that there is no such force.

Bringing Down The ALP Government

There is no basis yet for a new party that could agree on a platform, whether reformist or revolutionary, to seriously challenge the ALP directly. But a much lower level of unity and organisation is all that would be required to challenge the ALP indirectly through a 'Don't Vote' campaign. The Nuclear Disarmament Party has shown that very significant numbers are already sufficiently alienated from the ALP to break from it when the issue at stake is not whether the Liberal Party could come into office. Even if the numbers who are not intimidated by the prospect of a Liberal Government are much smaller, they could easily be sufficient to cost the ALP a few marginal seats and thereby cost it office. Large numbers already voted informal where NDP candidates were not available in the last national election, even without an organised campaign, and this could not have been just because ALP supporters are too stupid to be able to

understand the ballot paper, as claimed by their 'leaders'. Quite small numbers would be sufficient to tip the balance in marginal seats.

At public meetings of People Against ID Numbers and the People's Tax Summit, proposals to run 'Don't Vote' campaigns in marginal ALP seats have been adopted overwhelmingly. The main opposition came from a handful of 'Communist' and 'Marxist-Leninist' supporters, and not from ALP supporters. At the recent Mayday march, leaflets advocating the 'Don't Vote' campaign were generally well received. The only difficulty was that some people would not take them because they were headed 'How to vote LABOR' so they thought they would not be interested! A number of social movements are finding that the direct enemy oppressing them is the ALP Government rather than the 'New Right' and there seems to be a mood developing favourable to bringing that government down. The 'New Right' itself, seems to be largely a reaction to the Liberal Party's great difficulty distinguishing itself from the ALP and the view that there is little to choose between the Government and Opposition is now commonplace. Many ALP supporters are looking for ways to show their disapproval of Government policy.

Thus whether or not it is desirable, the objective of bringing down the ALP Government is at least feasible, unlike the objectives of turning the ALP into a left party or electing alternative candidates. This in itself establishes the basis for a very different kind of campaign from the usual left 'protests' that are not expected to achieve any particular concrete objective.

There is considerable scope for raising the slogan 'Bring Down the ALP Government' in all sorts of extra-Parliamentary social movements and not just in the electoral 'Don't Vote' campaign. This would sharpen up any struggle in which it was raised by clearly identifying the Government as an enemy to be defeated rather than a friend being petitioned.

Whether this feasible objective is achieved or not, merely attempting it would be a significant breakthrough from the present political climate. Just raising the banner of a left tendency explicitly hostile to the ALP rather than tacitly aligned with it, could in itself alter the terms of political debate in Australia.

With all the traditional 'left' tendencies now engaged in frantic ecumenical activity rather similar to the Christian churches, it is about time for some atheists to point out that the decline of the 'left', like the decline of Christianity, is due to its bankruptcy and will not be reversed by ecumenical unity. A real debate, over a concrete political initiative, will do far more to clarify where people really stand and what is wrong with where we stand, than any amount of propaganda about things we all agree with, or disputes about events in the past history of other countries.

The principal objection to the 'Don't Vote' campaign is simply that the Opposition is worse than the Government and would be the immediate beneficiaries of bringing down the Government. That objection is not easily answered, and its strength is the reason why we can only expect a fairly small minority to support the 'Don't Vote' position initially.

But it is an objection that can be answered and the process of answering it, and forcing ALP supporters and other 'pinks' to justify their position will in fact be the main benefit of the campaign. The numbers of people who become convinced that the differences between the ALP and the Opposition are not significant enough to justify actually supporting a reactionary conservative ALP Government can only grow in the course of this debate. There is no chance that we would come out of it with less support than we went in with.

The other main objection will be that it is a purely negative, destructive campaign that does not present any positive alternative to the ALP and again highlights the fact that the left has no serious program of its own. That too is an actual advantage. We can only frankly admit the charge and it is essential that we do frankly admit the real situation in order to change it. We cannot develop a vision of the kind of society we want or a strategy for getting there until everybody has clearly understood that we really don't have one at present. At least we can get across the idea that there is a force in Australian politics, capable of influencing actual events, whose politics are not expressed by the ALP or the opposition and that wants to develop such a vision and such a strategy.

This would suit the interests of both those who want to build a new reformist party and those who would eventually like to see a revolutionary communist party emerge. An essential

precondition for either is that significant numbers of people declare their political independence from liberalism by refusing to support the ALP merely because it is more liberal or less conservative than the Liberal Party.

If the ALP is brought down simply by the bankruptcy of its own policies, we will probably see another period of the 'left' pretending that all the problems of capitalist economic crisis can be blamed on 'Howard' just as they were previously blamed on 'Fraser' and are starting to be blamed on 'Hawke'. (Indeed organisers of the 'Broad Left' conference have already started pretending that various attacks on existing conditions result from pressure by the 'New Right', conveniently ignoring the fact that the Government which is carrying out these attacks is their own).

If a 'Don't Vote' campaign is partly responsible for Labor's fall, the same nonsense will emerge, but it may be much weaker. There is a real difference between the atmosphere that would result from the Opposition being elected because the pendulum has swung back to conservatism, and that which would result from them being elected because a new force has emerged to the left of the ALP and hostile to it.

Certainly there would be a real polarisation on the left and thus some opportunity for the political situation to open up and new tendencies to emerge. With all the ALP supporters and other 'pinks' screaming 'treachery' and desperately trying to convince people that the differences between the ALP and the Liberal Party are terribly important, there would be some scope for genuine ideological confrontation instead of the boring futility of most political discussions at present.

As for the effect on conditions generally, it is not a matter of advocating 'the worse the better', but of recognising that it is the level of people's struggle that determines what Governments can get away with.

In some areas, such as social welfare, the Opposition will undoubtedly be worse than the ALP, but the resistance to their policies may also be stronger and better organised. Perhaps some funding of community groups would be slashed more savagely than they are by the ALP. But the Liberal Party would also fund community groups for the same reason that the ALP does – to

keep people off the streets and divert them from building a genuinely independent movement. The left was much stronger during the anti-Vietnam protests before the Whitlam Government, without any funding, than it has been since. It may not be such a bad thing if some of the 'pinks' did have their funding slashed.

In other areas, such as attacks on unions and ID cards, the Opposition would have much less possibility of succeeding with reactionary policies than the ALP does. In many areas, like foreign policy, there would be no noticeable difference because let's face it, despite all the ravings from the ALP left, the Opposition are not fascists but just conservatives like the ALP. Whatever the overall balance sheet, the mere assertion that there is a left, politically independent of the ALP and able to influence events by its own strategies, would outweigh any possible disadvantages. We don't have that now and we need it desperately.

Afterword

The above paper is over seven years old but I still can't see anything wrong with it. Am I in a time warp or does the current political situation in Australia (with the names of a few politicians etc changed), really call for an identical analysis and tactical proposals to those I put forward seven years ago? If I got it wrong, I would like to see my errors explained and alternative proposals for electoral tactics put forward. If I got it right, how come there hasn't been much action on these proposals over seven years? In either case, why hasn't there been some noticeable change in relevant aspects of the political situation over seven years, or if there has been, why haven't I noticed it?

It seems to me that the ALP Government at least is still seriously concerned about the potential damage that could be inflicted on it by these proposals, and has good reason to be. It 'won' the March 1993 Federal Elections by a total margin of less than 2000 votes after dishonestly sneaking legislation through Parliament during the end of session rush to prohibit advocacy of an informal vote. Without that legislation, the minimal publicity that even a piss weak campaign could have obtained in the mass media would certainly have been enough to influence more than a couple of

thousand ALP voters in marginal seats and therefore enough to have cost them the election. If there had been a more vigorous campaign and significant numbers of people had been able to make an issue of the ban itself, the ALP would have been defeated despite (or partly because of) that legislation (s 329A of the Commonwealth Electoral Act).

Challenges to the constitutional validity of s 329A and of the rigged elections that were 'won' using it are currently wending their way through the High Court but won't be resolved until 1994. However there hasn't been much mobilization about the quite outrageous attack on basic democratic rights involved in threatening six months gaol for advocating a lawful vote and 'winning' an election by those means.

Nor was there much mobilization in 1987 when the ALP Government's Australian Electoral Commission stooges claimed it was illegal to advocate an informal vote even though there was no legislation to back them up. As a result they got away with effectively fining Harry van Moorst \$12,000 for exercising his right to campaign against all candidates in the 1987 election, by threatening to sell his house to pay for court costs from resisting their injunction. (The court rejected the AEC's demand for an injunction restraining advocacy of an informal vote, but granted an injunction against advocating no vote at all, with costs, on the basis that a 'Don't Vote' campaign might encourage voters not to comply with Australia's compulsory voting laws, even though the campaign was urging voters to turn up and record their informal votes rather than staying at home apathetically. Subsequent campaigns were renamed 'Vote Informal' to avoid any possible confusion on this point – so the ALP brought in s 329A to make that illegal – and similar State legislation in South Australia.)

A vigorous effort could have brought the Government down already. Even a minimal effort now could make them pay dearly and help ensure their defeat in the next elections (which may not be a full three years away). It would also help consolidate democratic rights and involve people concerned about the ALP's increasingly vicious attacks on those rights. Anyone interested in helping should contact the Vote Informal Campaign, 111 Bradley Grove, Mitchell Park, SA 5043 (phone 08 374 1446).

I would also appreciate it if somebody not interested in helping could explain just why this doesn't grab them. Why is there only a

(small) functioning campaign in Adelaide now and nothing in Melbourne where activity was strongest in 1987? Are \$12,000 fines and threats of six months gaol for exercising elementary democratic rights not worth bothering about? Is fear of the Coalition deeper now than it was in 1987? Or is it just general demobilization and demoralization?

SOME QUESTIONS

'Perplexed'

Reading through most of the articles prepared for the first issue of this journal brought two feelings. First, a warm glow that here at last was a journal I could broadly agree with, would not feel embarrassed to distribute, and might even get enthused enough about to write for. Second, a serious doubt that this would really become a 'journal for discussion of revolutionary ideas' rather than just another propaganda magazine, perhaps with more acceptable propaganda. There is something too pat or cut and dried about the 'line' running through the articles I've seen so far to really encourage 'discussion' (although I basically agree with them). Yet 'discussion' or development of revolutionary theory, is what is desperately needed, not propaganda.

To some extent that is inevitable with a first issue. An initial position has to be set out before it can be discussed and developed further. However I believe the position set out for discussion should itself emphasize the inadequacy of our theory and focus on the need to develop, not just propagate, some ideas before a genuine 'red' movement can emerge. Unfortunately the articles I have read do not emphasize this. There seems little point commenting on the large areas left untouched – a better approach would be to contribute something on some of those areas for the next issue. But I hope the following comments and questions will help stimulate debate in the next issue.

'What We Need Is a Revolution!'

I'm glad to see the traditional 'red' position restated – it's refreshing compared with the pap put out from the pseudo-left. But there is a limit to how refreshed one can feel as a result of reaffirming very ancient truisms. Why does that position have so little support and why have movements based on it collapsed and turned into their opposites? Surely that question must spring to mind when writing sentences like this: 'Despite the eventual defeat of the Chinese revolution after his death in 1976, Mao left us with a better understanding of the problem of capitalist restoration and how to fight it'.

Under the concluding heading 'Where to from here' there is an implicit admission that the author, like the rest of us, hasn't got the foggiest clue about what can actually be done using the wonderful insights provided by a 'red' position:

As economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate we are sure to see a resurgence of rebellion against capitalism. For the moment conditions are quiet and the immediate task ahead for revolutionaries is to introduce radical ideas into the public arena. This will provide the basis upon which to create a revolutionary movement and eventually a revolutionary party that will contend for power with the capitalists. Victory will depend on winning popular support and defeating conservative resistance.

Most people in what passes for the 'left' these days would agree with that – precisely because it is so obviously wrong. The problem is that we don't have much in the way of radical ideas to introduce into the public arena. That suggests an immediate task of developing some, not just pressing on with general truths from decades or centuries ago and expecting to win popular support on that basis. So far the result of deteriorating economic and social conditions has not been revolutionary rebellion against capitalism but conservatism and reactionary opposition to capitalism (often presented as 'left', merely because it opposes capitalism). Pinning one's hopes for a resurgence of rebellion on depressing conditions is depressing. Depressions are depressing.

The article refers to a change in 'human nature' stemming from both a 'new empowering role in production plus a fundamental change in all other areas of life which will see people becoming full participants in the political, intellectual and cultural life of society'. Fine, but doesn't that also imply a more 'empowering' process than is expressed by 'winning popular support'?

Also, conditions aren't really all that 'quiet'. In fact we are in a period of relatively rapid social change – but 'reds' are 'quiet' because we don't have much to contribute. For example internationally the collapse of the East European police states and the Soviet Empire has profound implications for the rest of the world as well. Advances in science and technology are more interesting to radically minded people than relatively stagnant politics. Closer to home in the State of Victoria, Australia, there is quite a lot of 'noise' about the cuts imposed by the State Government as a result of its budgetary crisis – strikes, demonstrations, occupations etc.

Consider the local Victorian struggle over education cuts. If 'reds' are serious about transforming society so that workers will 'come to control production rather than be controlled by it', surely we ought to be able to help develop some ideas useful to the people now occupying schools that have been closed by the Government, and resisting attacks on conditions at other schools.

Militant struggle isn't much use if there is no way it can win in the present economic climate. But surely there must be some ways that parents, teachers and students can unite with others to actually achieve real benefits rather than just protest and lose. For example the Government wants schools to raise more of their own funds. That means worse conditions all round, especially in areas where parents are less well off and therefore also less well organized. How about responding 'positively' by using school facilities (including work done by students supervised by teachers) to establish economic enterprises that raise money as well as improving education by relating it more closely to real life and helping to organize parents and develop links with other sections of the community?

An interesting possibility might be to establish community newspapers and other media based at occupied schools and involving other schools, parents, unemployed teachers and other workers etc. Why couldn't they compete successfully with the bourgeois mass media as well as being immensely educational and a direct weapon for organizing against the Government? With funding slashed for special programs for migrants, are there ways that such community media (in all languages) could help involve English speaking parents and students and others in taking some of the load off teachers and help non-English speakers get organized at the same time as teaching them English?

Such proposals would run straight into trade union opposition concerning 'volunteerism' and raise complex problems about taking the heat off the Government and assisting it to cut funding further. But if we are serious about workers overthrowing the Government and re-organizing society themselves, surely we have to come up with some kind of action program that isn't based on demanding that the existing bourgeois regime organize things better for us. When we do, and we find the Government is preventing us from using the facilities we need to get on with implementing our program (not only empty schools but also

other means of production) that's when it makes sense to speak of revolution, to get them out of the way so the people can get on with it.

I have no idea what is possible in Victorian schools at the moment – but I'm sure there are some teachers and others around who could contribute interesting articles on the subject. Such articles developing revolutionary theory on 'changing the nature of work' in that area would shed a lot of light on what some of the classical 'red' propositions actually mean and why we really do need a revolution to achieve them (and what kind of revolution and how).

'Red and Green Don't Mix'

Again, I basically agree with the article. But I'm angrier about having to agree with 'smug conservatives' against the greeny pseudo left 'who think they are being terribly radical' but in fact are being 'even more conservative than the conservatives'.

Actually, only the more moderate 'conservationists' can be legitimately described as 'conservative' (which they admit to, even choosing the name 'conservationist', which is no more different from 'conservative' in content than it is in spelling). The 'radical' greenies and especially the brownies are more accurately classified as 'reactionaries'. The greeny reactionary opposition to modern industrial society criticised in the article is indeed a 'polar opposite' of 'red' attitudes.

Unfortunately it is necessary to restate the obvious: we want to progress from capitalism, not react against it. But having said that we need to understand why this appalling reactionary gibberish has managed to displace 'red' ideas and how to fight back. I would like to see some articles analysing the appeal of green (and other) reactionary politics and the defeat of red politics. Why are so many of our friends attracted by overtly reactionary and consciously irrational rubbish? Has it peaked? Is an alliance with progressive capitalists against reactionary 'socialists' appropriate? (Cf Lenin's alliance with the 'legal marxists' against Narodism).

I think the bankruptcy of, and consequent disillusionment with 'red' politics is a major factor explaining (perhaps a bit tautologously) the appeal of reactionary politics. It seems easier to

talk about that informally among friends than write about it. It's been a while now since anybody has been traumatized by their experiences with 'red' politics. Can we write about what went wrong and why we lost interest and what kind of politics would be worth fighting for?

'Refuting "Anti-Imperialist" Myths', 'The Kerr Coup – Another Myth' and 'The Left and the Gulf War'

These articles raise similar issues to 'Red and Green Don't Mix'. The pseudo-left views being criticized are such incredible drivel one has to wonder how they became dominant. Alternatively one has to wonder whether the circles in which they became dominant are worth polemicizing with – after all most people are not even mildly interested in the reactionary mythology of the pseudo-left.

How many people rallied around the pseudo-left efforts to defend Iraq's occupation of Kuwait when they were deluding themselves that their mobilization in support of fascist aggression would be the beginning of a new anti-war movement similar to Vietnam in the sixties? The whole mobilization collapsed completely within days and those responsible for it have said nothing much about it since, because there is nothing that they could say without admitting that they misunderstood the situation completely. How many people actually share the pseudo-left's fundamentalist conception of the USA as the 'Great Satan'? (This remark should be taken literally – one cannot argue about the Gulf War with a pseudo-leftist for more than a couple of minutes without running into the problem that those who believe in the 'Great Satan' are not amenable to rational argument.)

Likewise, how many Australians, even die hard ALP supporters, really believe that compelling the Whitlam ALP Government to face a general election when it could not obtain supply from the Senate was a 'semi-fascist coup' plotted by the CIA etc?

Again, how many actually believe the 'development theorists' allegedly 'anti-imperialist' suggestion that the people of the Third World have been getting progressively worse off during the modern era?

Unfortunately, many good people are influenced by green politics and other reactionary drivel from the pseudo-left, who were once

progressive, or still are on some issues, and who could be progressive and even revolutionary eventually. Propaganda refuting specific reactionary views may be useful in helping such people. But the fundamental problem is the vacuum in 'red' politics that has allowed reactionary ideas to spread unchallenged for so long. Despite that vacuum the reactionary pseudo-left remains totally isolated and insignificant. Refuting their ideas will not be very difficult, but neither will it be decisive, since they have so little influence anyway. A genuine 'red' left can avoid isolation and insignificance but we can't start building one without developing a better understanding of what it's all about.

What is it all about?

This journal does not need a large number of readers to succeed. It needs a small number of regular contributors willing to actually respond to each other with comments, questions and fresh ideas.