

#34

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Howard's war against the trade unions

In bourgeois terms, John Howard doesn't have much of a mandate. He did promise to privatise part of Telstra. Most of his subsequent attacks have been rationalised by the discovery of a budget deficit blowout. Massive cuts were then justified on the grounds of being "economically necessary".

He does have a mandate to attack unions (despite the election lie that no worker would be worse off), if you embrace bourgeois democracy. Bob Hawke certainly does. So in the interests of "democracy", Hawke is co-operating with Howard to dismantle the basic organisations of immediate economic struggle hard fought for by generations of workers. We communists must put working class interest before their rotten system.

Here, Howard can be fully entrusted to keep his promise - to the system and the bosses. The Hawke and Keating Governments had carried through "industrial reform" as far as possible while at the same time leaving the basic trade union structures intact. Hawke/Keating Labor had no fundamental solutions to the economic crisis e.g. unemployment and inflation. So the electorate voted for Howard's completion of the economic rationalist agenda including the removal of trade unions. Howard, at the political level, was completing the offensive begun by CRA's declaration of war against unionists at Weipa. The failure to extend the struggle, to launch an offensive nationally, exposed the unions' weakness. Keating Labor and the trade union bureaucracy (notably Jenny George) did their utmost to contain and limit struggle.

The trade union movement showed its weakness. Now Senator Reith is pushing through legislation to severely attack it and its gains such as the closed shop. Labor's totally inadequate unfair dismissal legislation has been repealed (with the help of the Australian Democrats). Trade union awards are to be reduced to twelve basic points. Under attack are such gains as tax-free travel to work allowance, very important for building workers who might be sent anywhere within a large metropolitan area such as Sydney or Melbourne. Some workers may be sent to outback Western Australia without travel allowance, or alternatively it may be taxed. Trade union organisers no longer have the right of entry to factory or building site. Those who have a five week annual leave will find that it is reduced to four.

The strategic aim is to replace awards with individual contracts. Bosses will be in a very powerful position. All talk of negotiation will be mere rhetoric. Bosses will be able to force workers to accept oppressive conditions and minimal wages with the alternative, the dole queue. Individualised and isolated workers will be forced to compete against each other. Those who accept the lowest pay will get the job. This is a recipe for slavery. It is how the bosses want to resolve the crisis at our expense.

Left wing union leaders do understand the issues involved. From building workers, public servants and maritime workers there have been mass rallies and demonstrations. The maritime workers, seamen and wharfies, understandably consider themselves to be the main target. Indeed the bosses want to smash waterfront organisation. Waterfront workers have a reputation and tradition of militancy. Their defeat would be a major symbolic blow. However, as well as this, they play an important economic role in the Australian economy. With the restructuring from manufacturing to extractive industries such as mining, it is wharfies and seamen who have the key strategic role in the transport of these materials. And so, in their for even greater profitability, the bosses complain of "restrictive work practices on the waterfront"

The Maritime Union of Australia, in response to this threat organised a mass rally in Sydney on May 25. This was well attended with workers from all over Australia (including Darwin and Perth). Addressing maritime workers were their leaders, Coombes and Papaconstuntinis. As well on the platform there was Bill Kelty, Jenny George Wendy Caird, Stan Sharkey, Labor member for Shortland. A Green Senator from Western Australia. George and Kelty made it clear that the ACTU leadership were well and truly behind the MUA as their defeat would be a major setback for unionism. George praised their militant tradition as part of the movement against the Vietnam war and on other social issues. But often the alternative is starvation. The principled international campaign against "ships of shame" is one which unites workers internationally for decent conditions

everywhere. It is not one which is patriotically Australia and sells out workers overseas.

The union leaders talked about the need to defend the union. But this "defense" involves a commitment to Australian shipping and economic efficiency. The MUA boasts that they have cooperated - in reducing stevedoring employees by 57% and a reduction in crew numbers of 45%. As well they have supported the containment of wages. Wages have risen a mere 10% over the past ten years. The MUA boasts its subordination to the system's drive for "efficiency" meaning higher profitability. The MUA "defend" themselves by arguing that as they have cooperated fully, the bosses are unfair and illogical in attacking their organisation. This defense is suicide. Union leaders who cooperate with the bosses offensive cannot defend their organisation when they are threatened by that offensive. The bosses drive for profitability requires the smashing of all basic organisation of the working class. The choice posed is: do we want to be part of the bosses offensive or do we want to fight it?

The other aspect of the MUA campaign is lobbying against "ships of shame". Yes! The wages and conditions on many ships is disgusting. Unionists must take a stand. But the campaign offered was a chauvinist campaign for a respectable Australian shipping industry. A defense of workers from those countries wasn't even posed. Workers and seamen have a record in fighting "ships of shame" in a principled way. In 1970 workers at Pt Kembla defended workers from Nuigini on hell ship "The Slott". Through work bans they won for the workers mess facilities, adequate bedding (including sheets and pillows) and a lot of other improvements. Some crew members were sleeping on bunk boards. The united actions of the Waterside Workers Federation and the Seamen's Union were victorious. This type of workers action - uniting workers internationally—is unfortunately not what the bureaucrats have in mind. Workers from "third world countries" work under unfair and disgusting conditions. But often the alternative is starvation. A principled campaign against "ships of shame" is one which unites workers everywhere for decent conditions everywhere. It is not one which is patriotically Australian and sells out overseas workers.

The question the bureaucrats refuse to confront is: Why are trade unions in such a state of weakness? Over the past thirteen years membership has dropped from 55% of the work force to 33%. Why is it that Howard in the last election was so effective in kicking the anti union .can, picking up votes not just from the right but from former unionists who felt that unions had given them nothing. At a Maritime Defence Committee meeting Communist Left argued that it was the politics of reformism and the Accord-subordination to the Hawke and Keating Governments - has strangled the unions placing them in a position of weakness. J Coombes MUA leader rejected this. He said that the reason for the decline in union membership was the tendency for union officials to remain in their offices. Well this is part of the problem. It is linked to the Accord also. If all you need to do is lobby the Government and "agree" to sell out, in exchange for titbits, then organisation at the rank and file level becomes an optional extra. In fact it might even be a liability as rank and file unionists might challenge the sellouts.

But why is membership of unions with grass roots organisation (such as the CPSU) declining? Because workers don't see the need to join as their leaders sell out wages, conditions and jobs. The current deal of the CPSU leadership namely refusing to fight sackings in exchange for the Union's recognition is hardly likely to inspire the rank and file. It is a sure recipe for membership decline.

The current weakness and vulnerability of the unions is directly linked politics of reformism and Stalinism which have dominated their leaderships. The struggle to defend the unions is therefore, directly linked to the struggle for the struggle for politics of class struggle instead of class collaboration. Communist leadership of the unions is urgently required if unions are to defend their very existence. This leadership must be earned in struggle and forced down workers throats as an ultimatum. Nevertheless, a political break from reformism must be made.

One group which avoids this is the International Socialist Organisation. Late last year, they held a meeting addressed by Weipa miners leader Nigel Gould who claims to be a loyal member of the ALP. Two members of against ships of shame'. Yes the ISO did denounce the Keating government and the Labor Party. But, unfortunately, these contributions had no consequences in relation to defending the Weipa miners. The ISO defense of the miners avoided any mention of politics. The current ISO leaflet does attack MUA collaboration with the system. But it fails to call for an alternative political leadership. Basically the ISO offers consistent unionism - economism. The same leaflet praises the efforts of a group of workers in Karatha W.A. who don't concede wages or conditions, or jobs to the boss. Of course these may be good militants. But ISO avoids the fact that they share the same reformist framework. We are consistently told by ISO that "Unions have the power to beat Howard." We find it no accident that ISO sell a pamphlet by Tom O'Lincoln on the Militant Minority Movement of the thirties. Clearly the ISO in their defence of unions abandons the fight for a political alternative.

For Communist Left, the defense of unions from Howard's offensive is linked to learning the lessons of reformism. The Labor Party is now in a state of weakness and can offer no alternative. The Hawke Keating programme of economic rationalism with a safety net failed. Labor knows that the system wont accept any socialist or even Keynesian type reform programmes either. Any defiance of the system's agenda means the sack from the Governor General. No Labor Government is prepared to risk that. So all Labor can do is sit back and point the finger when Howard goes a bit too far. Labor is hardly an alternative to Howard. The only programme which can bring down the Howard Government is a Communist programme. This requires a revolutionary communist party. Communist Left is committed to the construction of such a party which is vitally needed to defend the unions, fight the Howard offensive, and to fight for the overthrow of the system itself.

Semi-fascist/ racist right on the offensive: Gun Lobby and Blaxiand by-

election

Howard was elected by an unstable alliance. It was an alliance of those who wanted to continue Keating's economic rationalist agenda by excluding the unions with the semi-fascist, racist right. But there has recently been a major split in the alliance. The extreme right are emerging as a political force in their own right, independent of Howard's Liberals. In fact the extreme right seem to be the only opposition at the moment as Beazley's Labor remains virtually silent.

The mass killings in Port Arthur, Tasmania created an alliance across the political spectrum. Howard's Liberals, Labor (notably Bob Carr's N.S.W State Government) the ALP Left (notably Keep Left in Queensland) and the liberalised-Stalinist Left Connections are all "in unity" for tighter gun controls.

In opposition are the fascist-sponsored gun lobby including the Shooters' Party. Included in this broad front are the newly elected racist independent candidates, Pauline Hanson and Graeme Campbell and National Party dissident Bob Katter who vows to risk expulsion from his party. Behind the scenes are Australians Against Further Immigration and the Citizens' Electoral Council whose guru is Lyndon LaRouche, the American fascist, who was a Trotskyist in his youth. Both of these alliances are thoroughly and utterly reactionary. The message of the Howard popular front is that only the ruling class, their agents, and those considered respectable should be armed. Fascists, who believe in arms, have been forced out into the open. The strength of this "law and order" alliance has put the extreme right a bit offside with sections of capital with whom they aspire to cement their relationship. This gives the semi-fascist opposition credentials as opponents of the state. It has also helped them consolidate politically across Australia. Whilst they are offside in opposition to mainstream public opinion on this issue, they are confident of taking on the Queensland National Party to split it.

The extreme semi-fascist racist right also surged ahead in the recent Blaxland by-election. Paul Keating's resignation from parliament resulted in a by-election in his seat centered around the Bankstown area of Sydney. There were eleven candidates. The Liberal Party did not stand a candidate. Predictably the Labor candidate won easily. He polled about 59% of the primary vote. The significance of this by-election is not so much the vote for Labor. It is the fact that most of the Liberal vote went to the extreme racists - Australians Against Further Immigration and Reclaim Australia, Restrict Immigration. These two reactionary formations polled about 22% of primary vote between them. In the last Federal Election AAFI polled a mere 2.8% there. This is a massive swing. This is a major shot in the arm for the malignant semi-fascists. Local factors were important. The racists were well organised. Many were angry at there being no Liberal candidate. However, this is no cause for complacency. Rather, it gives fascists confidence that they can split the Liberal Party.

Australia is a long way from fascism. Fascists are organising to put themselves on the mainstream political agenda in a serious way. Fascism will appear attractive to chauvinist sections of the working class and sections of the middle classes because it offers extreme solutions when they appear to be required. The current system offers them no future. The left must counter not with capitulation to chauvinism or bourgeois legalism but with a revolutionary alternative. All immigration controls must be opposed. All attacks on immigrants (such as their right to social security) must be opposed. Fascist meetings must be broken up physically. A left which is submissive to the system wont be seen as an alternative-and isn't! The only future is fighting the system around a revolutionary communist programme.

Why we need a shorter working week now!

To move to full employment will empower working people's lives

Marx's axiom:

"the law of supply and demand of labour works
according to the proportion into which the working
class is divided into active and reserve labour
army".

"as soon as labourers learn the secret: how it
comes to pass that: the more the work, the more they produce, the more their productive power
increases, the more precarious is their rope as self
expanders for capital;

"as soon as they organise, e.g. by trade unions,
regular co-operation between employed and non
employed to reduce the ruinous effects of this
'natural' law of capital;

so soon does capital, and its sycophant, political

economy cry 'foul' on its 'secret'. 'natural' law of
supply and demand.

Any combination of employed and unemployed disturbs the harmony of this law in action". (C1 25:3)

The operation of this law and the inevitable resistance it creates drives labour's struggle to wrest control of production the objectifying of labour time from capital.

Dissolving the division between the active and reserve labour army is a core working class objective. A campaign to achieve full employment through progressively reducing the work weekday is a key strategy to achieving this.

In a time of restrained 'average' growth and jobless recovery, permanent unemployment set against increasing overwork, increased pressure to down grade wages and conditions and preparation by increasingly reactionary governments an offensive to destroy any independent combination of labour or measures for its welfare the greatest need for organised labour is to focus and encapsulate objectives by which to wrest the initiative and redefine the battlefield on which the ideological and actual struggle is occurring.

Labour needs a vision by which it can liberate itself and society, where our work and industry will interact rationally with nature, with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most worthy of our human nature.

Full employment- with the broadest participation in the work force, with reduced work hours and increased leisure time, spread most equitably across the work force and across our work lives - will empower working people.

Shortened work hours a shortened working day is the basic prerequisite for the liberation of labour and its ability to expand its realm of freedom. It is the key to the abolition of exploitation, the dissolution of class, the disappearance of the state and the beginning of human history.

There needs to be waged a campaign around the Key demand:

For a sliding scale of hours and wages!

This is a demand for a continual reduction of the working week at the boss's expense, and not at the expense of workers' pay packets. As long as there are unemployed the working week must be reduced so everyone has the right to a job.

Of course it poses the question of what leadership will fight for this vital demand. Well it certainly wont be the reformists who tie workers to the system, forcing them into accepting more and more sacrifices for the benefit of boss's profitability.

Nor will it be the stalinists who offer alternative plans for capitalism in the name of the "first stage in their two stage theory of revolution. The second stage never seems to come. So all they offer is capitalism. The demand for a sliding scale of hours and wages radically challenges the nature of work in this society. Therefore it must be linked to a programme which fights for the overthrow of this system of exploitation _capitalism.

The trade union bureaucracy wont give us a shorter working week because they too are committed to capitalist profitability. Therefore this must be fought for on the shop floor by working class direct action. Shop committees are essential for this purpose. The bosses will fight working class direct action - arms in hand. Therefore workers must organise workers' militia. The demand for a sliding scale of hours and wages is an integral part of the Transitional Programme which the Communist Left fights for - so that socialist revolution is on the agenda for working people today.

Whilst it is only a revolutionary communist perspective which will consistently enact this demand, Communist Left will work with any worker militant or any organisation within the workers movement who actively wants to make the issue of a shorter working week policy of the labour movement. It is also a key demand in organising amongst the unemployed. Contact us if you support a campaign.

Unemployment was a key issue in the last Federal Election. Keating lost because he had no credible answer. The two alternatives posed are; expand the economy or shorten the working week. Capitalist growth is no benefit to ordinary working people. On the contrary; the faster the growth rate of the economy, the greater inequality in society.

What is the situation in 'mature' capitalist economies like Australia's towards the end of the 20th century, five years into the current 'growth' cycle? Reading the daily press is revealing enough. 'Figures leave out 1.1m jobless' (SMH 2.7.96)= A detailed breakdown of the labour market...found that there are 1.9m Australians out of work but only 760,000 satisfy the ABS definition of unemployment...(these people) are categorised as being 'marginally attached to the labour force and do not figure in the official data. This group, which includes large numbers of housewives, young people and the aged, falls into the ranks of the hidden unemployed"

'Why hard labour works so well' (SMH 17.4.96) " Today we face the paradox of high unemployment at the same time that many of the rest of us are working longer and harder than we've ever done...last December full-time workers worked an average of 43.5 hours and almost a third worked more than 49 hours. ..Bargaining power has been shifting towards employers over the past decade, and now the institutional props to employee power are being pulled away...employers have an increased need and an increased ability to cut their labour costs...by requiring their workers to do more unpaid overtime". (Marx - "The overwork of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of the reserve, (while the competitive pressure of the latter on the former) forces these to submit to overwork and subjugation under the dictates of capital" C1,25:3)

'Sacking staff has become an end in itself' (Sydney Morning Herald 21.5.96) "The culture of tightness is dispiriting for workers, creating a spiral of despair that immobilises rather than inspires; it focuses vision inwards rather than outwards

'Lack of control at work can kill' (Sydney Morning Herald 2.7.96) "People who have little control over their jobs and who get little social support at work are almost three times as likely to die of cardio vascular disease, a new study has found".

'Job related death figures greatly exceed estimates' (Financial Review 16.3.95) "...around 2,700 workers died every year from work related causes... there are around 300,000 non-fatal injuries... workplace injuries resulted in lost working time amounting to more than 10 times the amount of time lost from industrial disputes".

'Ten years on - and we're working harder for our tucker' (Australian 10.3.95) "Australian workers spend longer earning money to buy their food than they did in 1995 ... (a basket of 15 food items) took 3 hours 7 minutes - up 31.7 per cent on 1985".

'Black jobless rate still 25%' (Sydney Morning Herald 31.5.96) "...nearly one in four indigenous Australians is out of work - but the rate would be twice as high without the CDEP, or 'work for the dole' scheme.

Russian elections

The capitalist counter-revolution has given Russians a choice of political parties. Unfortunately, all the political parties fundamentally support, the same economic system for Russia - capitalism. There are differences in tactics between the main contenders for office. But ultimately they are all aiming for the same objective - a market economy for Russia. Mr. Yeltsin and supporters are known as Russia's Choice. More accurately they are imperialism's choice. They are the grouping that Clinton and major entrust the most to revamp Russia into a western democracy". Naturally, this will ensure Russian resources can be freely exploited by the US, Japanese British, European and other multinationals. It will mean that Russian labour is cheaply available to these imperialist who will pay minimal wages, with Yeltsin's consent.

The main opposition comes from the so-called Communists. The "Communists" led by Zyuganov don't even aspire to yesterday's bureaucratic degenerated workers state. Rather, they use the banner of October and their continuity with post-capitalist USSR to rally workers to a milder version of the reform agenda, spiced with nostalgia and the promise to be less painful. They promise a softer approach to the same economic destination - a market economy for Russia. They have won support from those who are suffering through Yeltsin's agenda. However, any "reform programme" meaning capitalist restoration can only mean hardship.

The other main alternatives are sinister and utterly reactionary. Mr. Lebed scored ten percent of the vote. He represents military repression. This will be required as more and more angry Russians become impoverished and rebel. Mr. Lebed admires the likes of Joseph Stalin and General Pinochet of Chile. This gives us a good indication of how he would behave in government.

Lebed won votes away from that malignant Russian chauvinist and racist Zhirinovskiy who scored five percent. Nevertheless Zhirinovskiy is still a national figure with political influence. He has the capacity to divert workers and others from fighting the real enemy to blaming national minorities. He intends to play the same role as fascists do everywhere throughout the capitalist system and especially in imperialist countries.

One candidate, well known internationally, Mikhail Gorbachev, polled poorly. He only got one percent of the vote nationally. Gorbachev is yesterday's man who means nothing to no one. The left hate him for betraying the Communist Party and paving the way for Yeltsin. The right hate him for not wanting to far enough along the road to counter-revolution. Both left wingers and right wingers booed him at election meetings.

The journey to capitalism can only be painful. Russians are learning that under capitalism rights to decent social welfare and cheap housing are nonexistent. They are learning and will continue to learn that the industries which employed them will go out of existence as they are not profitable as far as the system is concerned. They will organise and resist. But victory requires political direction. The spontaneous upsurges must be linked to a programme which re-establishes proletarian dictatorship in Russia. Unfortunately this revolutionary option was not

posed during the last Russian Presidential election. A revolutionary communist party is urgently required to fight reaction-now! Revolutionary communism is starkly posed as the only alternative repression, bureaucracy and austerity.

N. Z. International Socialists fuse with stalinist C.P.N.Z.

The Communist Party of New Zealand, the former section of the Third International, has since the twenties been the most visible and largest organisation in that country proclaiming the traditions of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Of course, like the whole of the Third International, it became thoroughly Stalinised. During the sixties and seventies it raised the banner of Mao Tse Tung and Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha. When Mao broke with the Kremlin, the CPNZ (alone amongst western communist parties) supported Mao. Elsewhere, except in the third world, Maoist parties were formed as breakaways. In New Zealand, the pro Moscow stalinists broke from the main Communist Party. They formed the Socialist Unity Party. When Hoxha broke from Mao, the CPNZ supported Hoxha and the Maoists split away. The Hoxhaite Albanian liners supported a one stage as opposed to a two stage theory of revolution. Nevertheless the remained committed stalinists and therefore opponents of Trotsky. They were also virulently anti-soviet.

It says something in their favour that, when Albania was exposed so blatantly as a brutal repressive regime that the CPNZ reviewed it's politics - and made some important changes. Trotsky was once again recognised as a revolutionary hero of the Russian revolution. Stalin was denounced. All this was a promising beginning.

Of course, merely recognising Trotsky does not make one a Trotskyist. Trotsky not only opposed Stalin but did so on the basis of supporting proletarian dictatorship. He recognised that whilst the peasantry had a material interest at the expense of workers, they had to be won over to accepting proletarian leadership, not by bureaucratic administrative measures but by a political programme. The alternatives posed were destructive to the revolution. These alternatives being either pandering to their privilege or bureaucratic repression. The Right opposition of Bukharin did the former. The Stalin faction did both - with devastating consequence. Millions were killed both by the brutality of his repression and because of starvation and other horrible consequences of his bureaucratic mismanagement. Mass murder by the stalinist bureaucratic clique was by no means accidental. Nor was it a product of Stalin's personality or megalomania. Stalin had to kill off the living tradition of Bolshevism for the survival of his reactionary clique, living at the expense of the Soviet proletariat, committed to itself at the expense of revolution. It was also a product of right errors concerning the peasantry. Having promoted this privileged petty bourgeois layer whose interests threatened the revolution, Stalin's response to the potentially restorationist threat was bloody physical repression as he had abandoned the Marxist programme to win over the peasantry in a principled way. Trotsky saw the Stalin clique as a bureaucracy with distinct social roots. It represented those from the old bureaucracy from the Tsarist regime who had latched on to the new Soviet power. The misnomer to describe Stalin's Soviet Union 'state capitalist' is not merely a terminological inaccuracy leading to the reactionary practical conclusion--the refusal to defend the USSR against imperialism. It is an attack on Trotsky's analysis of bureaucracy.

The Stalinists learnt nothing from the murder of Communists and workers by the Kuo Min Tang. In fact it has been codified in the form of the "National Liberation Front"-militant armed struggle under the banner of the national bourgeoisie. Unfortunately this form of Stalinism has been endorsed or even hailed by some "Trotskyists" (notably the United Secretariat).

Since the Thirties, Stalinist parties vacillated in their tactics from the ultraleft socialfascist line which equated social democracy with fascism to the ultra respectable popular front. All these tactics reflected the interests of a bureaucracy which put it's parasitic interest before the world revolution. Thanks to Stalin, Communists permitted Hitler to rise to power and crush the German working class. "After Hitler -us!" was their rallying slogan which permitted the crushing of both communists and the working class by fascism. Thanks to Stalin, "Communists" were loyal to imperialism during the Second World War and played an active role in smashing strikes. The CPNZ were no exception.

The CPNZ may argue that despite being part of a rotten movement, their heart was in the right place. This is certainly true for some of their better militants. But, irrespective of intent, the whole political education of cadre and methods of organisation was permeated by this method.

A stalinist party can only be considered to have broken from Stalinism if, and only if, it has been confronted with such an analysis and has drawn the appropriate political conclusions, correcting the political, organisational and class errors.

Internationally, the rise of this bureaucracy had massive political and social consequences. The revolutionary Third International (Comintern) degenerated. It was converted from an international for proletarian revolution to an international for apologetics for the bureaucratic degeneration internationally. As the bureaucracy feared revolution, therefore "Communist " parties became agencies for reconciling potentially revolutionary workers with "their own" bourgeoisie, nationalist or imperialist. In China it meant that the Communist Party of China, with a membership of millions, became liquidated behind the banner of the Kuo Min Tang, the national bourgeois, anti working class party who are now in power on the island of Taiwan.

It is to the credit of CPNZ that it now wants to associate with Trotsky. The International Socialists did not seek to win over CPNZ. The CPNZ fell into its hands. Internationally, the International Socialists leadership opposed the proposed fusion. SWP Britain leader Alex Callinicos wrote to his NZ comrades:

"Thank you for your very prompt reply to my letter. Plainly we disagree about whether it is a good thing for your two organisations to merge: there is no question of what the ISO calls a 'central directive' forbidding the fusion. In the circumstances the most sensible course of action seems to be that we should agree to differ, and put our conflicting judgments to the test of practice. We will be happy to be proved wrong. Perhaps it is worth stating, in response to the ISO's charge of 'fatalistic pessimism', that we are not afraid of seeking to win organizations with different histories and traditions to our Tendency. What we do know, however, from our experience of these attempts is that breaking from Stalinism is a long and protracted process; however sincere the ex-Stalinist comrades desire to put their past behind them, it still continues to influence them in ways of which they are unaware. You seem determined to press ahead with the merger. Let events take their course. We have no intention of 'cutting you off'. We shall continue to supply you with publications, Should your representative attend Marxism 94 we will be happy to review our differences in the light of experience

Yours fraternally
(signed] Alex Callinicos

This letter shows the irresponsibility of the International Socialist Tendency internationally. The Communist Party of New

Zealand has fallen into its lap. They have the responsibility of confronting CPNZ with their past politics and the consequences for class struggle in New Zealand. Callinicos has his right to an opinion whether "optimistic" or "pessimistic". But it is grossly irresponsible for the 1ST not to intervene. The New Zealand ISO section was small, inexperienced and based in Dunedin. They were limited in their capacity to deal with the CPNZ who had real roots in the working class. Therefore the international leadership must take responsibility.

The International Socialists, of course correctly demand that is that CPNZ (which became SWO) side with Trotsky in his dispute over Stalin. Of course, without this any fusion would be inconceivable. CPNZ reply by pointing out that they had a faction fight, precisely on this issue. The overt Stalinists resigned. CPNZ also committed themselves to an investigation of Trotsky's writings and theory. CPNZ members were given SWP material on the positive and negative features of Trotsky's work. What is revealing is how ISO posed the question of Trotskyism to the CPNZ.

CPNZ leader Barry Lee describe the ISO attitude to Trotsky as follows:

"The ISO sum up Trotsky's positive contribution as;

- He kept Marxist-Leninist tradition alive during the 1930's (after the Stalinist betrayal). Regardless of weaknesses, Trotsky stands out as the only internationally renowned Bolshevik leader who fought for Marxism and against Stalinism. His analysis of fascism.
- His writings on the united front tactic - His analysis of reformism. The value of his historical writings, particularly his history of the Russian Revolution."

Report on Discussions with ISO in Dunedin 15 17 October 1994

What is omitted from this list is revealing. For a start it is no surprise that ISO do not mention his analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union. The International Socialist were established as a betrayal of Trotskyism. On this vital issue - the defense of the conquests of the October Revolution - the stand for selling out to imperialism. Recently they supported the Yeltsin counter-revolution.

The other major omission is Trotsky's analysis of permanent revolution including critique of the Chinese Revolution. His Marxist approach to national liberation and the peasantry. His understanding that only the working class, fighting for proletarian dictatorship can complete the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Trotsky, contrary to Stalinist critics did not undervalue the peasantry. But he saw them as having an interest at the expense of the working class. He saw that they could be won over to proletarian leadership - but in no way should they be adapted to. He saw liquidating the working class behind the banner of the peasantry to be potentially suicidal for the proletariat and a recipe for degeneration.

This is a vital question in New Zealand. The CPNZ became Maoist, after Mao's break with Khrushchev and then pro Albanian. In other words it had a thorough education in the Maoist method of adapting to peasant privilege. Without an understanding of Trotskyism on this issue they remain Stalinist.

But the important question is one of political method. To what extent do the exCPNZ relate to issues in a Marxist way? CPNZ argue that they always acted subjectively in the interests of the working class. They cite their "united front of Labour" strategy. But is this consistent with the Trotskyist concept of a united front or some variant of the Stalinist popular front? ISO relates in its usual student vanguard way. It argues that this is necessary due to the downturn in class struggle and the isolation of revolutionaries. But the CPNZ has not been merely a propaganda group. They have educated a whole layer of militants within the New Zealand working class. These militants, party members, ex members and should be re-educated and corrected. Or at least shown where the old CPNZ went wrong. What about the CPNZ method of international solidarity? For example in the peace movement, the protest movements against the Vietnam and Gulf wars? The old CPNZ had a Stalinist concept on internationalism and not a Marxist one. During the Gulf war the CPNZ had a militant social-patriotic opposition to the war not a revolutionary Marxist opposition. These issues have not been confronted in the fusion. In reality the totality of CPNZ practice was a mixture of militant popular frontism combined economism and third period formal leftism. It was totally permeated with Stalinism. Its internal regime was thoroughly bureaucratic. It is of vital importance that they understand such concepts as leading role of the party and democratic centralism from a Marxist point of view as opposed to a Stalinist bureaucratic one. In the broad housing front SHAC the CPNZ bureaucratically excluded Workers Power for daring to differ. CPNZ bureaucratically imposed its tactics on SHAC. Workers Power have been excluded for daring to differ. Recently one militant Peter Lusk was excluded from the Auckland Socialist Centre for daring to challenge their state capitalist analysis and suggesting that CPNZ investigate other groupings as well as ISO. It is this that they have to be confronted with. It is not enough for CPNZ now SWO to put out a paper with the usual ISO trivia (such as commercialism of rugby league through Super league and the ARL), or denouncing Winston Peters racism (without giving a Marxist analysis).

The ISO demand CPNZ accept their school of party building involving the recruitment of anyone who buys Socialist Worker. This isn't Leninism. Very much to the contrary! Either it means a serious dilution of politics as the paper buyers with their uninformed, divergent ideologies participate in the party. Or alternatively only an elite control the political line with the new "members" recruited through the paper denied any input. Liberal menshivism or bureaucratism is what it leads to. The CPNZ have been to the left of the ISO on the party building as they have correctly insisted on members only being recruited after they have established fundamental agreement with the party line.

It also must be pointed that the CPNZ have been opportunist in the way at they have latched onto the ISO. They have not made a thorough investigation into the degeneration of Trotskyism and the Trotskyist movement internationally. Nor even the ostensibly Trotskyist New Zealand left. Their examination of the International Socialist Tendency has been impressionistic. Their agreement on "state capitalism" comes from their Maoist Stalinist background. For the CPNZ yesterday's great revolutionaries become today's blackest counter-revolutionaries. CPNZ applied this "method" initially to the Kremlin Stalinists, then to those in Beijing, then they realised that Albania was rotten. So that there was no one left. Hence yesterday's great socialist paradises became state capitalist". This is crude impressionism. From this "method" CPNZ discovered they had the same method of counterrevolutionary despair as the International Socialist Tendency. So CPNZ took up the banner of Trotsky to give themselves the fig leaf of continuity with the October Revolution. This method of counter-revolutionary despair is not Trotskyism.

Both the International Socialist Tendency leadership in their sectarian aloofness and their opportunist NZ comrades are in error. The International Socialist Tendency has an obligation to confront CPNZ with a Marxist analysis of Stalinism including its role

internationally and its role in New Zealand. Any fusion can only be made on the basis of a total break from Stalinist theory and practice. No political concessions are permissible. From our knowledge of CPNZ, we are cynical about their ability to do this. But some comrades might learn the lessons. More important, sections of the working class could learn how Stalinism has destroyed the revolutionary movement in New Zealand and internationally. And that would be a very important lesson for them to draw indeed!

Bougainville PNG armed forces on the offensive

Since the late eighties the Papua New Guinea Government backed by Australia has been fighting the Bougainville people organised through the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, based largely on the Panguna farmers. These small farmers are understandably angry at the destruction of land and resources by the giant copper mine owned by Australian based Conzinc Riotinto Australia owned by parent British multinational Conzinc Riotinto. The war on Bougainville has been Australia's hidden war. It has been portrayed as an internal PNG law and order issue. But in reality it is a war to defend imperialist interest at the expense of the Bougainville people. Australia's role has been to assist PNG with helicopters and mortars.

Last month PNG Prime minister Julius Chan announced Operation High Speed aimed at flushing BRA forces out of stronghold areas, such as Kanjara and Panguna. PNG is now aiming to win the war quickly. This is understandable. PNG is in severe economic crisis. There has even had trouble paying its troops keeping "law and order" in "North Solomons" Province. Therefore getting the war over quickly might be of economic advantage

This offensive has created a division between the Chan Government and Australia. The new Foreign Minister for Australia, Alexander Downer has protested at such an overt use of force. He would prefer an underhanded covert war which could be swept under the carpet. An overt war might put Australia in the spotlight and expose Australia's dirty imperialist intervention. Chan has responded angrily. With a gesture of defiance, he has declared that his country has the right to deal with a dispute involving PNG's internal law and order by what ever means is necessary. This talk may appease some PNG people who rightly see him as an Australian lackey.

Chan is only disputing what military methods serve best, the imperialist ruling class. Irrespective of whether the war is covert or overt, or what military tactics are used, our position remains the same. Imperialism, including Australian, can play no progressive role in PNG or Bougainville. We must oppose imperialist intervention in all its forms, economic, political or military. We must support the right of the people of Bougainville to self determination. This right has been they have been deprived of by imperialist imposed boundaries. Through demonstrations in opposition and direct action against CRA The Australian Government and war supplies, Australian workers must act now! We must not be accomplices to imperialist plunder which has deprived the Bougainville people of their national rights.