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Putin the KGB Agent takes control of Russia

East Timor. Australian/UN occupation continues.

It is supposed to read like a fairy story. After much public consternation, rallying and lobbying John Howard finally was persuaded to send troops to “save East Timor” under the banner of the United Nations. John Howard finally acknowledged the just cause of the Timorese and the failings of both parties, Liberal and Labor, both of whom had betrayed the Timorese. Howard acted partly in response to mass disillusionment. After all imperialism had justified interventions elsewhere on the grounds of “preservation of human rights” (etc) what about East Timor? Howard restored their faith in imperialism by his actions.

Howard’s actions have been very politically fruitful in terms of Australian politics. Officially, Labor agrees with it. The problem is the Paul Keating and Gareth Evans put a spanner in their works. They have justified Labor’s previous gung-ho pro Indonesia line initiated by Gough Whitlam. Gough Whitlam did not believe that small nations could be viable so he sold out the Bougainvilleans to Papua New Guinea and the Timorese to the Indonesians. He actively promoted East Timor being “part of Indonesia” in the United Nations. Australian bourgeois forces, Liberal and Labor have had a long record of guilt on the question of Timor. And this guilt is being used to promote Australian sponsorship for imperialist intervention. Whereas before Australia supported Indonesian repression and domination against the Timorese, now it supports the United Nations. Either way the people of East Timor lose.

Had there been an election late last year, Howard would have won by a landslide. Timor would have swung many traditional Labor voters to voting Liberal. Intervention into East Timor has had the support of not just mainstream and bourgeois forces. It was actually called for by Fretilin and in Australia, by the Democratic Socialist Party. In the short term it may appear to be a saviour for the Timorese against the vicious vigilantes promoted, controlled and dominated by Indonesia.

In the short term lives may be saved from the militia. Even now there are problems —rapes have been reported from Australian servicemen. But it is the long term which is the problem. Imperialism exists to maintain superprofits. It will certainly take its pound of flesh. Imperialism will never tolerate an independent East Timor which might threaten superprofits. Australia has agreement with

Indonesia over oil in the Timor Sea. In no way will an independent Timor be allowed to interfere with its self proclaimed right to extract billions of dollars worth of oil for which the Timorese get nothing. Imperialism puts oil and money before the lives of Timorese any time. It will not tolerate any government which would expropriate the bourgeoisie in Timor. No doubt arrangements have been made for the multinationals to move in and exploit Timorese.

The only way Timor can get self determination is by the arming of the people themselves with assistance from international working class action. There can have no faith in Fretilin who have sought imperialist intervention, finally achieved their ambition and betrayed the Timorese people

Putin KGB agent takes control of Russia.

While everyone was celebrating the dawn of the new millennium, the armies of Russia were being bogged down in Chechnya. Now they appear to be winning but it has been a long hard struggle with many casualties. Russia's failure to win decisively has led to the resignation of Boris Yeltsin. It has been amazing that Yeltsin has been able to hang on for so long. Mr Yeltsin has been a sick man under pressure. Since 1989, he has made no secret of his historic mission — the reconstruction of Russia (and other parts of the ex-Soviet Union) into a capitalist state. Yeltsin's movement was mainly sections of the bureaucracy who wanted to break the shackles and control the means of production outright. He was also backed by those who thought that a turn to capitalism might give them much sought after consumer items. Queues, shortages and scarcity has always plagued the bureaucratic-degenerated workers state who had no means of determining what ordinary people wanted to buy. Many, no doubt, wanted the end to the cold war. Military expenditure has made up an extremely large proportion of the Soviet economy, This as well as the international pressure put on the Soviets by the United States leader of the world capitalist system.

This has been a very painful process. There has been massive unemployment, homelessness and hunger. Many learned at their peril that social gains, welfare and public housing would not be maintained in a profit oriented society. They also didn't realise that most of soviet union industry was not, on capitalism's terms profitable. So therefore their jobs would be dispensed with. The government has not been able to pay wages immediately. Pensioners have also suffered.

There have been some who have benefited —Russia's new rich elite. Yeltsin has given them virtually a blank cheque to enrich themselves — profiting out of the misery of many.

The majority are disillusioned. Many are supporting the Communist Party which is growing in stature amongst people who realise that things were once better. Unfortunately the Communist Party does not offer communism. They merely offer a more humane road to a "mixed economy".

A serious problem for Yeltsin and counter-revolutionaries has been the national question. The counter-revolution was based on nationalism and promoted national independence movements in nationalities incorporated into the Soviet Union such as the Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Soviet Union depended on interpenetrated nationalities for exploitation and distribution of resources. The break down into nationalities meant that oil, coal iron ore has had to be purchased from the newly independent states and more power to those with a strong resource base. Yeltsin on one hand can't oppose the nationalist movements. But on the other hand he cannot let them get out of control. Basically those outside the Russian Federation got their independence but those part of

Greater Russia have been deprived their right —even though their incorporation into Russia was totally artificial.

Yeltsin has shown in action that he has been prepared to come down on rogue nationalities like a ton of bricks. And that is what happened to the people of Chechnya. Yeltsin has been forced to retire so Vladimir Putin is ready to use his KGB training to finish the job. Putin was kicked out of West Germany when he was a Soviet diplomat. The Germans had good reason to believe that he was working for the KGB

Putin basically uses the stalinist method of cracking down on dissident nationalities — state repression. When Hungary and Czechoslovakia defied Moscow's dictates Russia brought in troops and tanks. Putin will do the same. He wants to extend Russia's military offensive against the people of Chechnya.

Revolutionaries believe in the right of self-determination of nations. We do this not because we want to promote nationalism but because we want to make it redundant. Lenin made an analogy to marriage. A marriage is based on equality when both partners choose to live together voluntary — and have the right to leave the relationship. We want international unity but we want international unity based on national equality. Forced international unity based on national inequality can only exacerbate nationalism when the oppressed people object to subordination.

Stalin dealt with dissident nations in a brutal way. And in doing so actually promoted nationalism. But his aim was to preserve socialist unity. Putin has no socialist ideals whatsoever. He offers the same stalinist repression — for the benefit of the Russian elite and new bourgeoisie. As we go to press, Putin has just stated that he wants Russia to be a great power again. He has announced more military spending. This at a time when Russian people are being forced to endure hardship due to the restructuring of the economy.

New Zealand Labour elected again1Economic rationalism with a trendy image.

Late last year saw the election of a Labour government in New Zealand. This party has nothing to do with the organised working class. Gone are the days when Labour represented socialism (even through parliament) or even significant reform or even to represent working people .In most countries people vote Labour because it projects an image being more human and caring and less economic rationalist. In New Zealand, it was Labour who began the economic rationalist offensive. Roger Douglas (who initiated the rationalist campaign known as "Rogernomics") left Labour to form the hard rationalist Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT).But Labour has not fundamentally changed direction even though it might be a bit wet for the likes of Douglas.

Labour's leader New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark has a boomer image like Clinton and like Blair. She is an extremely capable politician. She knows how to appeal to those with left sentiments. And of course she is perceived as a supporter of women's rights. She appealed very skilfully to middle class people. Yet she not merely inherits Labour's economic rationalist tradition, she is an active party to it. As minister for Health she was responsible for "reforming the health sector". This meant massive cutbacks in hospitals and privatisation. She looks forward to continuing the process.

One of Labours first moves was to extend Work for the Dole to the fifty-five year old age bracket. Of course, with people of that age this oppressive burden can't be rationalised as any form of training

or preparation for work. It is an outright abuse of these people which will mean hardship and misery. It is even harder to live on the dole in New Zealand than it is here. This is not much better than slave labour.

Helen Clark is in no way slack on the question of economic rationalism. An important question is: why does Jim Anderton want an alliance with her?

Jim Anderton is the leader of the New Labour Party which is part of the Alliance popular front. He was formerly a leading member of the Labour Party. After the rabid turn to the right by Labour, he left in disgust with some unionists and radical leftists to form New Labour. New Labour stood for yesterday's Labour Party programme. Labour has traditionally stood for New Zealand chauvinist protection. Lange Labour abandoned this to give the multinationals open slather. Labour stood for increased welfare. Lange Labour abandoned this New Labour took up the banner. Labour has stood for bourgeois nationalisation. This has been long abandoned. New Labour has taken this up. Basically New Labour is yesterday's Labour — minimalist reforms and an alliance with the nationalist bourgeoisie. They have supported an incomes programme which, if implemented would be New Zealand's equivalent to Australia's Accord.

In the eighties Anderton made arousing speeches about the betrayal to Rogermomics. These are now absent. Once again he is making his peace with Labour — a treacherous Labour.

Because he was unable to counter Labour, Anderton tried to establish a mass base through a treacherous alliance — with the Green, Manu Matuhaki, the New Zealand National Party and others. This treacherous bloc — a popular front — amounted to selling out the working class on every level. Alien class forces including the bourgeoisie were explicitly represented. The common programme meant the maintenance of capitalism. Even the bourgeois demand for a republic was beyond its scope.

The Greens have left but the Alliance still lives. But Anderton is cuddling up to Clark. So much for the struggle against economic rationalism. Of course New Labour's capitulation is to be expected. Capitalism cannot tolerate reformism in the current economic environment. To be allowed to administer the capitalist state, you must obey capitalism's rules. And they are wholesale attack on the public sector and wholesale attack on workers' wages, conditions and even the defensive organisations of the working class — trade unions. Labour sells itself to the bourgeoisie as the party which can do this with the minimum of social dislocation and therefore maintain social stability. Indeed New Zealand Labour has done its job for the bourgeoisie — very well indeed. New Labour wants to administer capitalism, maintaining workers wages and conditions and the welfare system. This it won't be allowed to do. Anderton is crawling back to Labour because he wants political authority and influence

There are some such as the Communist Workers Group who call for a Labour/Alliance Government. They also demand an action programme including a workers government shorter working week opposition to immigration to immigration controls and other demands. This we believe is the wrong direction.

Firstly both New Labour and Manu Matahaki were progressive splits from Labour. Why should we direct workers who have learned progressive lessons back to a party which they understandably

hate? Labour these days is in no way based on the working class. But second we do not want the reactionary components of the Alliance such as New Zealand Party to have any connection with the workers movement. Critical support to the Alliance is totally out of the question.

This demand also, of course, means critical support for Labour when no degree of support is warranted at all. The Left in New Zealand should be urging decent working people to break away and form a party which stands for class principle. To parliament, communist's counter- pose a revolutionary workers and small farmers government. This is especially important in New Zealand where rural industries are such an important component of the economy. Communists do not adapt to the capitalist privileges of farmers. But we realise that they are also victims of the system. We win them over to the hegemony of the proletariat.

This election saw the Greens taste electoral success. They won their first lower house seat in any federal government anywhere. And as a result five other Greens get elected due to the New Zealand system of MMP. The Greens elected include former radical leftists. One is a former soft Maoist (WCL) and another is formerly SAL and has close ties with the Australian Democratic Socialist Party. The Greens will no doubt talk left. And many of Labour's reactionary policies will be exposed. But the problem is the class basis of the Green movement. They are consciously based on the middle class and have a reactionary attitude to social progress development and technology. They are a step away, a diversion, from building a class conscious alternative to Labour.

There are two other minority parties of note — New Zealand First and ACT New Zealand. New Zealand First led by former Nationalist Prime Minister, Muldoon's golden boy, Winston Peters, started off as split from the Nationals opposed to economic rationalism. Piggy Muldoon was viciously antiunion but supported strong state intervention. Peters aimed to continue this tradition. As Peters is Maori, much NZ First support has come from Maoris. NZ First also cashed in on anti migrant racism. The problem for NZ First was when it had the decisive choice over whether Labour would be elected last time or whether National would be. Peters chose the Nationals. This led to a rank and file rebellion as the rank and file wanted Labour. NZ First lost massively amongst Maori voters who are now strongly in the Labour camp. Peters himself got elected narrowly and therefore still has a chance of building a base amongst right wing middle class people.

The Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT New Zealand) did not poll well. But they still have seats in parliament. This rabidly economic rationalist party has made a turn towards racism. It no doubt realises that to build a base in the rightwing middle class you have to be socially reactionary and not just economically reactionary. ACT now has the support of former National heavy weight Ruth Richardson.

What does a Helen Clark Labour Government offer New Zealanders? She offers a continual impoverishment of working people, the unemployed and the poor while sections of the middle class are made to feel comfortable with token gains and a trendy image. Of course the rich will be allowed to get richer. It is because the left have been unable to provide a serious alternative that she has been able to get away with it.

Republican referendum: why it was defeated.

Just over a year ago it appeared that it was virtually a certainty that Australia would become a republic, it had overwhelming popular support. Labor and the Democrats support a republic. So do the Left. The Liberal Party is divided with Peter Costello and Peter Reith won to the republican cause. The old foes Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser are united as republicans. Fraser claims to have been converted when on making approaches on behalf of Australian's imprisoned in Serbia found the Queen couldn't help him as Britain was at war with Serbia. Fraser noted a conflict of interest. Of course there were the old diehard monarchists like John Howard and Tony Abbot. But these days hard core monarchists are indeed thin on the ground. The only party which campaigned for a no vote because of open support for the monarchy was One Nation.

As is well known the republican cause suffered a landslide defeat. And this testifies to the political skills of John Howard. Last election, Howard nullified the Labor Party's republican programme by offering a convention. On election Howard delivered his promise. The Convention was held. Within the Convention a model was voted upon to put before the Australian people. This model, not agreed to by all republicans was the proposal of the Australian Republican Movement was for a supposed independent president voted for by a majority (two thirds) of politicians in parliament. He could be sacked by the Prime minister. Currently the governor general cannot be sacked.

Howard won not by a successful promotion of the Queen but by sowing division within the republican movement. The no campaign was led not by monarchists but by Ted Mack, Phil Cleary and Clem Jones (former Brisbane mayor). They projected the ARM model as a conspiracy by the "top end of town" aimed at depriving ordinary Australians of their vote for president.

Phil Cleary certainly has a common touch. He is perceived as an honest battler for the little man. So is Ted Mack (although he is more middle class). Mack is known as a tough community activist Basically the ARM fell for their campaign hook, line and sinker.

People voted more against the Republican Movement because frankly, they are upper middle or even upper class smart-arse snobs. Their appearance and behaviour turned people off. Yes they had plenty of "arguments" but people smelt a rat. The Queen is not a major issue amongst many ordinary Australians. She seems so aloof and not relevant to anything. "If it isn't broken, why fix it" was a popular argument. given the current conservative climate of Australian politics, it seems unlikely that there will be Royal intervention against a hostile government (that is to the system or monarchy). The direct election no vote instilled fear. People thought fell things are ok now be might have something to lose with "this" republic.

The ARM kept on stressing how little change would be involved with the introduction of the republic. For many that was a good reason why not to vote for it.

Tailing behind this campaign were the revisionist left groupings International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Alternative and Progressive Labour. They made an effective attack against the indeed very treacherous and chauvinist ARM. Yes it does have a racist chauvinist white Australia perspective. Unfortunately the issue goes far beyond the reactionary middle class ARM. Progressive Labour argued that the referendum didn't deal with the whole of the totally undemocratic constitution. This is true but should not stop us voting the Queen out.

The correct way to vote in last year's election was YES. The situation was by no means perfect. But we were given a chance to remove a reactionary from the agenda of Australian politics. We had to take it.

The Queen is the wealthiest woman in the world. She is also one of the richest people. The reason that she extracts such massive wealth is a good reason to get rid of her. Of course she (or her heir or successor) will be sitting in Buckingham Palace until the British people do that. Voting her out in Australia would help the process.

But far more important is the political power she has. The Queen and not the governor general is head of state for Australia. This means that she is head of the armed forces and can dismiss parliament. She only might do this every blue moon. But even if it is done only once it is once too often. The Queen is not "neutral" but Tory. If a government threatens imperial order, she would have no hesitation in acting — against the people, and especially working people of this country. We are indeed compromised if Britain is at war with some country yet Australians choose to be either neutral or on the other side.

Historically the Royal Family has been a very effective rallying point for reaction. The Royal Family have been the bourgeoisies advertisement for how the model nuclear family should operate. Lady Di and Fergy have promoted as role models bourgeois monogamy. Of course the bourgeoisie may well find others. But we had a chance to remove these agents of bourgeois moral virtue. The quicker they go the better.

Legally the bourgeoisie rationalises its expropriation of the Black people of this country, by calling their land 'Crown land'. The formal ownership of this land according to common law is indeed the crown. Who will own this land if the crown is removed? We don't know enough about law to say that title and ownership would be rested in the original (Black) occupants. But many country people were indeed scared that this could be a possibility and voted NO. We wish the Black people all the best of luck. We doubt that a bourgeois government would allow them to get it back (even if they are entitled to it under common law) but the legal dilemma could expose the system. It would make any land case for title certainly much easier.

It is clear that Trotsky would have voted YES. In his article Revisionism and planning, he points out that most of the Socialist Party of Belgium were at heart monarchists. He pointed out that in times of political crisis apparent political ghosts come to life. In Austria he pointed out, the monarch assisted the rise of fascism. He concluded that you couldn't effectively fight fascism if you supported the maintenance of the monarchy. He said that revolutionaries should demand "the liquidation of the monarchy."

The Queen could play an extremely reactionary role in this country. This should be enough for revolutionaries and class conscious workers to have voted YES. We would appreciate it if those no voting ostensible Trotskyists could explain why Trotsky views on Belgium are not relevant to Australia. They have an obligation to confront the tradition of the ideology they claim to uphold.

During the election campaign we were told by Cleary, Mack et al that any defeat would only be temporary and for this model only. The republican bandwagon, they assured us, would go on. This has turned out to be utter crap. Referendums cost a lot of money. They are not called with ease; The

Liberals have now pulled rank. The debate, for them is over. And no one within their ranks believes in it enough to defy the dictates of the party. For Labor, they do not want to be seen as backing a loser. Another referendum would have to go through parliament and hardly anyone in parliament believes in the direct election model. So now the issue is dead. at least for the foreseeable future.

Republicans should realise that leaving the campaign in the hands of the liberal petty and big bourgeoisie can only lead to disaster. Needed was a workers campaign for the republic which would raise, as well as the monarchy, issues such as the Senate, the state structure. We hope Progressive Labour continue to expose the totality of this rotten constitution. The only programme which is consistently democratic is one which is consistently socialist — revolutionary. Such a programme will transcend the democratic tasks and expropriate the ruling class and establish government 100 times more democratic than this parliamentary fiasco.

Smash all immigration controls

There has been a lot of paranoia over the past three months. Boat loads of people have been detected off north west of Western Australia apparently heading for Australia. There has been widespread chauvinist hysteria from middle class people and the labour aristocracy, demanding the government 'do something'. What has been demanded involves increased state repression. This includes more policing of the coastline and higher penalties for those caught either coming to Australia or organising other people to do so. Both Liberal and Labor have come to the chauvinist party. People have demanded more repression — and both Liberal and Labor have been happy to oblige.

All this is very good for the ruling class. They want immigration controls. They play an important role dividing workers along national lines. They use chauvinism to tie the more privileged workers to the system. They use this chauvinism to get workers to support attacks on their own interests including wages, employment, cutbacks in the public sector etc.

In this context right wing columnist Gerard Henderson was able to put on the appearance of being liberal and caring. He pointed out that these boat people are victims who should not be treated as criminals. He pointed out that within both Liberal and Labor Parties there was no difference between left and right. Henderson supports immigration controls. But the gung-ho hard line views of virtually everyone else in the mainstream made his "caring" approach appear to be the left pole in the debate.

In some countries immigration controls have facilitated the growth of the extreme right — fascism. In France a chauvinist campaign was initiated by the Communist Party. The fascist Fronte Nationale won over their support by showing how they could be more effectively chauvinist. Fortunately in Australia at the moment, One Nation is tearing itself apart. This is fortunate. But banking on fascist infighting is indeed extremely foolhardy. The best way of beating fascists is to undermine the chauvinism from which they breed from. This means opposing all immigration controls.

Controls on immigration lead to state repression against ethnic communities. This is what has happened against Black people in East London, Algerians in France and Polynesians in Auckland. This could and will happen here as police raid ethnic communities "searching for illegal's"

An international ruling class offensive must be fought internationally. When Australian workers put themselves and Australian bosses before their class comrades of places like South Africa, Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines they play the bosses game. Australia used to have a “White Australia” policy. This has gone. But there is still the division promoted between those worthy of coming here and becoming citizens and those who are not. Basically it is still much easier if you are white.

Working people should be able to live in any country they choose. People with a blinkered Australian approach claim that by allowing people in we damage the ecology. What about the ecology of other countries. Actually, their case is spurious. Australia is a relatively empty country which could contain a lot more people. It is capitalism which is destroying the environment and ordinary people. Part of the problem is the lack of regional development and decentralisation. This is a fault of governments and the system not of working people or migrants.

For revolutionaries there is one major principle —the right of working people to live where we please. We must totally oppose the capitalist state policing us along national lines. All immigration controls must be unconditionally fought. Smash all immigration controls

35 hour week introduced in France

As of the first day of the new millennium, The French government officially introduced a 35 hour week. This should be considered as a minor gain for working people in that country. No doubt the ruling class will fight tooth and nail against even this minor gain. There have been angry protests by truck owners against the government. These will continue.

This will probably be sabotaged in other ways. Bosses will demand their pound of flesh through productivity deals. It will be absorbed by overtime.

Nevertheless it is a step in the right direction. Elsewhere such as Australia, working hours are increasing. Howard even wants school hours to increase in keeping with the current working week. Carr is enthusiastic about the idea also.

There should be no reduction in wages. In fact wages should be increased with the cost of living. Those who support a reduced working week and reduced wages are actually playing the bosses tune and making workers live in impoverishment. Make the bosses pay!

We warn French workers that they will have to fight if they wish to maintain even this minor demand. We warn them that the Socialist Party doesn't want to fight and therefore will sell them out. That is if it doesn't get kicked out before it has the opportunity. A programme going beyond reformism is necessary — that is a revolutionary communist programme. French workers should organise on the shop floor to fight attacks — now!

Communist Left supports a continual reduction of the working week until everyone is employed — a sliding scale of hours and wages. Our principle is clear: as long as there is one person who is looking for work and cant find it, the working week is too long