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Russia blitzes, occupies Georgia

Last August, South Ossetia declared its autonomy from Georgia which was part of the old Soviet Union before independence.. The Georgian Army responded in force. What they didn't count on though, was the Ossetians having a powerful ally - Medvedev's Russia. The Russian Army moved in like a ton of bricks. It didn't merely defend autonomy, it moved through Georgia occupying the city of Gori (Stalin's birthplace) destroying an aircraft factory near Tblisi and damaging shipping at the port of Poti. The message Russia made loud and clear was that Georgia is helpless and Russia can do as it pleases. Woe betide Georgia if it disobeys Russia's dictates. Russia can basically do as it sees fit. The weak Georgian armed forces were no match for the might of Russia. The USA and NATO allies may sabre rattle but in no way will they force Russia out. They might push Russia with trade sanctions and UN resolutions but not to the extent of declaring war.

Russia only believes in the right of self-determination for nationalities so long as it corresponds to its national interest. The war for Chechnyan self-determination has been dealt with brutally. Russia is defending South Ossetian self-determination as a rationalisation for controlling "independent" Georgia. Russia may have allowed states formerly part of the Soviet Union (Armenia, Azerbaijan etc) formal independence but woe betide them if they defy Russia's dictates! Georgia is extremely important strategically. Oil travels through Georgia from the Caspian Sea. The Russians also fear being surrounded by NATO-aligned states. This is why Russia felt that Georgia needed to be taught a lesson.

The west demanded peace and an agreement. President Sarkozy of France went to Moscow to demand precisely that. He got an agreement. Russia "agreed" to withdraw. There remains the question of what withdrawal means. Russia has recognized South Ossetian independence and demand the right to allow troops to occupy part of Georgian territory as a safety zone, so as to "defend Ossetia". Whilst it has agreed to withdraw from the rest of Georgia, it is taking a bloody long time to do it This is all designed to make the Georgian people suffer and show them that Russia is boss.

Russia recognises South Ossetia but does not allow it to unite with North Ossetia which is part of Russia. It doesn't really believe in Ossetian national rights. It just uses Ossetia as a rationalisation to invade Georgia. Neither Russia nor Georgia really believe in national rights and Georgia is now paying for its failure to recognise self-determination of nationalities located within its boundary.

In 1989 RED warned that the national question was a time bomb for the then existent Soviet Union. Slowly but surely, the bombs are exploding within the Russian Federation. Medvedev and Putin deal with it in same way as Joseph Stalin — chauvinistic brute force. There will be many similar brutal crack downs in the future. The effects on this on the Georgian population been devastating. Many in Gori have not eaten for days. Tblisi is packed to the rafters refugees, many from previous wars such Azerbaijan and Armenia. Now it is filled with refugees from its own country. Russian intervention has been devastating. Much of the infrastructure has been destroyed. It may take decades for Georgia to recover. Georg does have an ally, the United States of America. Georgia has learned in practice that America's promise to defend a country's independence only applies when America thinks it worth it according to her interests. America will though pour in the aid in order save face..

We have no sympathy with a Georgian government which has consciously thrown its hat with world imperialism. But Russia's efforts in no way represent a fight against imperialism. They represent a defence of a chauvinist hegemony.

Northern Territory Intervention: one year later

It is now one year since Mal Brough brought the troops to deal with child abuse in the Northern Territory. At least that is what their rationalisation was. We now have a Rudd Government which is also committed to the intervention.

Have things changed since? Only a little!

Rudd has promised and delivered more consultation with the community. He has made an arrangement for Black people to gain full-time employment. But basically, the Brough programme continues.

Occupied black communities still have to endure a police state. They have been deprived of their right to enjoy alcohol and pornography at home. No doubt the ban on pornography is rationalised by the spurious claim that pornography causes or encourages paedophilia. It doesn't!

Black people there have been deprived of social security rights. Their money is quarantined, forcing them to travel many kilometres to Alice Springs to shop as communities and small towns usually don't have a Coles or a Woolies. Often they can't afford the fare.

Black people have been deprived the right to appeal CentreLink decisions. Many have been forced to travel to mining communities or lose payments. Black property has been expropriated and communities have lost control of their property to the government. This is theft. There is no justification for this as much of their property was earned through compensation for stolen wages. Now it is being stolen again.

Troops and coppers consistently harass the communities. One poor woman who slept with a stick for security used it when troops suddenly burst into her home. She was shocked. She was charged with resisting arrest and assaulted in a police cell.

The Anti-Discrimination Act remains repealed. The government, guilty of blatant discrimination, remains immune. Seven hundred children have endured health checks - only one so far has been a victim of child abuse. It has hardly been rampant.

It is now clear that Mal Brough's agenda is to remove the communities from the central Australia and force Black people into towns and cities. Labor wants to abolish "unviable" communities as well.

It is the duty of the workers' movement to fight this unjust and obnoxious, racist military invasion and community destruction. There are serious social problems facing Black people in the Northern Territory and elsewhere. There are serious problems facing white people in, say, the housing estate in the outer Sydney suburb of Glenquarrie. The answer is not community destruction or a police state.

Free Lex Wootten! Palm Island militant faces court

In October Alex Wootten faces court in relation to the totally justified uprising in Palm Island off the coast of North Queensland, near Cairns. The mere fact that he faces trial exposes the racism of the Queensland "justice" system. You see what sparked the riot was the death in custody of Mulrinji Doomagee. No charges have been made against the cops responsible for his death. We certainly believe Doomagee was manslaughtered, if not murdered. In any case the police bear responsibility for someone dying unnecessarily in the police lockup. Alex Wootten faces serious criminal charges. The state punishes Blacks for rebelling yet the cops kill with impunity!

Black residents there have every right to be angry. In Palm Island they have no adequate housing, no adequate food, no adequate education and no future apart from poverty. They have every right to be angry and militant given their poverty and exploitation by the system generally. We must give them our full support. They must be backed in full by the workers' movement in not only in Queensland but throughout Australia.

Some conservative-minded leftists might criticise the Black residents for rising up in the absence of a strong working class. We blame the labour movement for refusing to stand up in their defence or only doing so minimally. The defence of black people under attack is the responsibility of working people everywhere. If you are party to the system when it attacks Black people then you can't fight the system when it attacks trade unions and working people in general.

In any case, Palm Islanders have achieved something. Without their militancy Doomagee's death would have been swept under the carpet. The rioters' rebellion was fully justified. It is our job to ensure that they don't face jail as a consequence. There must be a show of force by unionists, Blacks and working people outside Wootten's court case, showing their full solidarity. Wootten will also get a better chance of justice if the system gets the message that bigger issues are at stake, such as a workers' movement prepared to challenge a racist police state.

Workers' force is the best remedy for fighting racist police attacks. All the Royal Commission achieved was to unearth a few unsavoury facts and to show that governments do not listen to Royal Commissions when their conclusions inconvenience them. Besides, the conclusions drawn by the Royal Commission were totally unsatisfactory.

The worker' movement has a choice: either be subservient to the racist police state or fight it. The refusal of the workers' movement to fight has led to the situation we are now in where unions are weak, subservient and begging the Rudd Government for more humane treatment. This is all linked to the politics which dominate the workers' movement — reformism and Stalinism. Crucial to the regeneration is the building of a revolutionary communist party. It also starts with defending the

heroic black fighters who stood up to racist state repression. Communist Left salutes Alex Wooten.
Free him now! For workers' defence against racist police attacks!

Liberal Party: a crisis of leadership

Despite some problems, Kevin Rudd is still a popular man. On the whole there is considerable support for economic conservatism with a human face. Many just tolerate Rudd as the best of a bad lot. Brandon Nelson had trouble finding his feet. Now with Rudd being forced to make difficult decisions such as global warming. Nelson was caught off guard, first opposing carbon credits and then acknowledging that those credits are Liberal Party policy. Rudd has made hard decisions on the ecology but if they go wrong or there is serious economic hardship, Nelson will be ready to gain electorally. Nelson has taken some time to oppose Rudd in a way which taps into popular sentiment.

It is no accident that John Howard gives his full support to Nelson. They are both pragmatic and cynical. They both represent the same class, the politically backward middle class. The Howard Costello government succeeded because on one hand Costello gave the economic medicine whilst Howard could placate the chauvinist middle classes. He did this with disgusting campaigns against refugees and some bribes. Without Howard's sweeteners the government would have lost support from middle class sectors that they depended upon to win government.

Costello was always distrustful of Howard. He is a bit more liberal on social issues such as Aboriginal rights and refugees. He showed this by marching across the Sydney Harbour Bridge for reconciliation with half a million others. This showed how little this "reconciliation" meant. Economically he was critical of Howard for being too generous to the chauvinist middle class, giving them too much money.

Howard lost his seat so the three contenders for leadership are Nelson, Costello and Turnbull. Nelson is considered a benchwarmer, doing the hard yards whilst the Liberals wait for their new leader to emerge. Strategically Nelson is similar to Howard but he lacks Howard's knack of galvanising middle class chauvinist support... Costello is the hard line economic rationalist Turnbull is a true blue ruling class boy, liberal like Fraser.

If the rich ruling elite had their way, the leader would be Turnbull. Turnbull is a liberal Liberal His born with a silver spoon in his mouth image does not have the appeal to Howard's battlers. He is the best of them at scoring left wing points if Rudd's budget cutting becomes a bit too inhumane. He appears civilised and decent as opposed the Howard's dirty and grubby tactics.

Costello is too associated with economics. People correctly identify him with budget slashing, work choices and welfare "reform" This they don't like. But his reputation could be an advantage if the economy turns bad and Rudd falls off the rails. Costello would present himself as a saviour and possibly be a winner. Nelson is pragmatic and adaptable and he might become prime minister by default if there is a significant political collapse.

Currently, the ruling class are, on the whole, happy with Rudd who can deliver consensus and stability. He offers Work choices light without the same antagonism to unions as Howard. He is continuing the Northern Territory intervention with a few minor humane modifications. He is continuing "welfare reform" with a few humane modifications. Work for the Dole continues on. He has made a major change on refugees. Before every refugee who arrived by boat was thrown into detention Now government must show cause why a refugee must be placed into detention. Whilst this is a step forward, his overall policy is reactionary. His is a conservative agenda and we must not be party to it

Electricity privatisation: a crisis for NSW Labor

The union movement has just won a victory. Electricity generators will not be privatised. Victory is owed to the shrewd tactics of Liberal leader Barry O'Farrell who chose to vote against the government. Barry does not oppose privatisation in principle. He just argues that he doesn't like the

way it is done and that there are other ways of getting private sector involvement. He also knows how to put the screws on lemma. Business interests are disappointed with his opposition.

lemma has no mandate for this privatisation. In no way was it mentioned during the last election campaign. In fact previously we have been assured this wouldn't be happening. But things are economically desperate. There is plenty of money needed for infrastructure needed in New South Wales and the government is struggling to get it. In no way will it choose to take it from the bosses either by expropriation or by higher taxes. Privatising electricity gives a quick cash injection at our expense.

Privatisation can only happen once. The private sector argues that privatised electricity is 'more efficient' and it is — at attacking us. It is more efficient at attacking workers' wages, conditions, services and jobs. It is more efficient at attacking services to the public. If you go to Auckland they will tell you of horrific black-outs which occurred courtesy of a privately owned electricity system. Privatisation is for the bosses. The government supports it because it puts its AAA credit rating before that of the public.

Liberal opposition leader Barry O'Farrell is a clever man. He knows that privatisation is unpopular and gets accolades from North Shore commuters who appreciate his actions. He knows that the government is desperate for money, infrastructure will suffer and the new Rees Government will get the blame for poor infrastructure. He knows that a Liberal Government can privatise it in the future anyway. It is not quite a win — win situation as there is disapproval from business. But he will suffer this for a bit of electoral gain.

Meanwhile ALP democracy is thoroughly exposed. lemma and Costa were overwhelmingly thrashed at the last NSW State Conference. But they went ahead, totally contemptuous of ALP democracy. They also went ahead despite total opposition from the union movement. It's capital before democracy for lemma and Costa. lemma announced after their defeat in parliament that they would privatise infrastructure but not generation. They have no mandate for this either. And no doubt rank and file would reject this also. So much for democracy!

This power crisis brought down the lemma and Costa leadership though there has been an attempt to expel them. They have been replaced by Nathan Rees and Carmel Tebbutt. This is historic. For the first time in history, Labor's two state leaders come from the "Left" faction. Unfortunately this doesn't amount to much.

This leadership is pledged to economic responsibility. These days "Left" is merely brand name rather than a major political differentiation. We will see if Rees and Tebbutt go along with this partial privatisation. We urge workers and unionists to break from this party which has not only abandoned any commitment to social change but treats its own membership with contempt.

Negotiated stalemate in Zimbabwe.

Everybody knows that the people of Zimbabwe would prefer to have the Movement for Democratic Change led by Morgan Tsvangirai to administer their country. MDC won the vote for the lower house and if Tsvangirai had not stepped down from standing for President he would have beaten Mugabe hands down. So Mugabe remains president. Mugabe's supporters are abandoning ZANU PF because of high inflation and even mass hunger. Mugabe's main power

base remains the military.

Tsvangirai's step down was understandable. He knew that the election would be rigged. He also knew that anyone who campaigned for him or even voted for him would be tortured. He stood down for the sake of his supporters. He does, however, have the support of the western imperialist powers. But everyone knows Tsvangirai is the one most of Zimbabwe wants.

Mugabe is in deep trouble. Inflation is so massive that Zimbabwe can't even afford to buy the paper to print money. There are problems with food supply. Mugabe has handed over plantations to military personnel who have yet to master the art of farming. There are serious economic pressures from western economic boycotts. Mugabe knows that a reign of terror is not the way to deal with this economic misery. For the country to work efficiently compromise is necessary.

Tsvangirai, on the other hand knows that Mugabe and ZANU PF will fight to hold power tooth and nail and defeating them could be a long and bloody business. A negotiated powersharing arrangement could be the less painful option. Tsvangirai has called on the West to invade and impose true democracy, free and fair elections, but the west, whilst imposing economic blockades, hasn't listened.

So in August Mugabe held talks with Tsvangirai. These apparently went fruitfully with Tsvangirai declaring that Mugabe was human after all. But he refused any agreement which would give complete power to Mugabe.

The Stalinist popular front ZANU PF fought hard to defeat the apartheid regime of Ian Smith. Having fought so hard for power they have no intention of giving it away. They have no intention of letting a small issue such as popular will get in the way of what they perceive as their right to power. For most of Zimbabwe's independence there has been no contradiction between their power and democracy. They were the government that the majority wanted and no doubt thought they were impregnable.

A successful revolution in most countries requires a correct strategic approach towards the farming population large and small. After all, farmers are crucial to the physical survival for the working class. Yet farmers have land and therefore power. They often use this at the expense of the working class-- for counter-revolution. The white farmers who are behind the MDC were a privileged part of the apartheid regime of Ian Smith. After victory Mugabe and ZANU PF pandered to these farmers, giving them a power base.

The MDC has forged an alliance with the union movement has been cemented due to the fact that workers have been suppressed in the process of expropriation. Tsvangirai was a unionist before becoming a politician. Mugabe has ruthlessly repressed the union movement.. Now Mugabe has changed his tune, expropriating these farmers by military force. Those benefiting are not the proletariat of Zimbabwe but privileged sections of the armed forces. These elite bureaucrats and soldiers however, can't farm. The result is devastation and hunger. Mugabe deals with any challenge. with ruthless bloody suppression.

The MDC is, of course, totally counter-revolutionary. In no way must revolutionaries identify with them The MDC has even called for the West to invade!

Mugabe realises regime survival will be extremely difficult given the current hostility of the west and virtually everyone else, and with economic disaster. He therefore realises that change is essential. The imperialists may not invade but they will destabilise. Mugabe will collaborate with

the MDC and with the bosses. Capitalism will be the winner. The Mugabe regime is another malignant by-product of the legacy of Stalinism.