

HOW TO FIGHT PETERSEN: The Next Stage

Joh Bjelke—Petersen has learnt, and learnt well, the main lessons of Australian politics. One lesson is that democracy - capitalist democracy, this is - does not exist in Australia. In situations of emergency for the Australian ruling class, when profit rates fall or overseas investment goes on strike, the constitution of Australia is unveiled as what it really is, the constitution of a colony, and the Governor-General sacks at his pleasure elected governments. The other lesson of Australian politics Petersen has also learnt from the events of November 11, 1975. That lesson is how little opposition is either expressed or, effective. When events make it obvious that the political structure of Australia is basically undemocratic. If Sir John Kerr could sack Whitlam without himself being sacked, it is far easier for Petersen to ban demonstrations without fear of the consequences for his party or his government. Petersen knows that Whitlam and Burns are more concerned with election successes than political principles, that the organisers of anti-uranium moratoriums are weak—kneel liberals who will stop protesting if it means breaking the law, and that “left” union leaders like Hugh Hamilton only act on bread-and-butter issues. Petersen knows he has nothing to fear from such muddling, ineffective, vacillating and cowardly liberals and reformists. They will roar like lions about democracy in speeches but they will do absolutely nothing to change an anti-democratic law when it needs to be directly and immediately challenged by the strongest possible counteraction- the breaking of that law by the largest possible number of people in order to make it impossible to enforce. The Communist Party in Queensland led and organised such action, based around militant workers and the trade union movement, against similar laws in the thirties. The fighting traditions of the Communist Party and its links with the working class, however, long ago disappeared. This is why a real Communist Party is being built again by the Communist Left.

The first arm of Australian colonial capitalist state apparatus is the Governor—General, who not only dismisses Prime Ministers and dissolves Parliaments, but is the chief officer, the supreme commander of the military forces and the police, the second arm of the State. The Liberal and Labor leaders think it prudent to camouflage these facts, to persuade their supporters the appearance of democracy is reality. Petersen, by contrast is not afraid to call things by their right name and so easily manipulates other politicians who treat the democratic sham as reality. Petersen only claims some of the ‘credit’ for abolishing freedom of assembly, he allows his commissioner of police to announce the decision is really his. In Queensland there is no distinction between the Government and the Police Union (There is no distinction in other states either, but the premiers there are duped by their own propaganda that the police take their orders, not vice versa). This situation would not be changed if Australia could abandon its dependent and colonial position in the world economy to become more independent in a capitalist framework, if Australia followed the “rules’ of capitalist democracy, or if the National Party stopped governing Queensland. Every capitalist state is an institution for repression needing a semi—dependent police force to protect its ruling class. Colonial capitalist states are more dependent on police than other capitalist states because the manipulation of universal suffrage to permit the ruling class to govern has not developed to the extent it has in more “advanced democracies”. The fight against Petersen, the National Government and the police must be not for an impossible “reform” of police-government relations for a state form which does not require a special apparatus of repression because it organises the vast majority of the people, the working class and the allies they lead, to maintain in being a society controlled and directed democratically by themselves, through workers councils, against any threat from the insignificant minority of capitalists – such a state is called—in opposition to the present dictatorship

by businessmen — dictatorship in the working class, Communists can lead the fight against Petersen because, like Sir, they have no illusions about the role of democracy and the role of police violence in Australia. Petersen knows Australia is run by a colonial oligarchy supported by the police. He wants this kind of society. Communists also know Australia is a colonial oligarchy supported by the police. They fight to smash this society. Between these two points, the extremes of right and left in 1977 Australia, there lie only different degrees of political illusion and vacillation.

Why is Queensland governed by the National Party as a party of the extreme right? Farmers, the political base of the National Party are, according to Marxism, a petty-bourgeois stratum without interests of their own, orienting toward the strongest class in the battle between capital and labor. In the Australian context, where a national bourgeoisie independent of overseas capital hardly exists, and, the working class is sold out with monotonous regularity by the Whitlams, Hawkes and Burns, a farmers party becomes the more or less direct agency of American and Japanese imperialism. (The Liberals represent imperialism indirectly, as a party of the comprador bourgeoisie). The National Party's economic policy of supporting an extractive colonial economy based on exports of primary products and unprocessed minerals- an economic policy totally opposed to growth in the manufacturing sector - follows from its role as direct agent of imperialism. Even the National Party does acquire a certain limited independence when questions arise of competition between rival imperialist powers and reluctance by overseas capital to invest. In this situation a state government controlled by the National Party attempts to offer imperialism every possible conceivable incentive or bribe- to invest, no matter how out of step' this makes it with the Federal Government and other states. This 'independence' is in reality evidence of the extreme dependence of the National Party state government on imperialism. Queensland has become the Australian state most subordinate to imperialism at precisely the time when Petersen is proudest of his "independence of Canberra.

A continuation of economic depression accompanied by a fall in exports to and investment from America and Japan could endow the present temporary and deceptive appearance of Petersen's 'Independence' with a more real and permanent character. A policy of attacks on the rights of assembly, free speech, picketing and strike action which failed to continue to attract overseas investment could lead, as it has in New Zealand, to a government deeply committed to the service of imperialism, becoming the unwilling champion of state "independence" at the cost of intensified exploitation of the working class. Increasing attacks on imperialism - for failing to profiteer at the expense of Queensland workers go side by side with attempts to cut back workers' wages and conditions to compete with other areas in offering any new imperialist overlord a favourable environment for investment. In such a protracted crisis, the Queensland state would move even faster than at present toward Bonapartism. The reactionary character of its policies would cease to be dictated directly by the general interest of the multinational banks and corporations, but instead the momentum of reaction would develop of itself on the basis of the frenzied mobilisation of the middle class. A Bonapartist state would preserve order until imperialist domination was again stabilised. Bonapartism would become a police- bureaucratic dictatorship barely concealed by the decoration of parliamentarism. In conditions of continued absence of imperialist stability, Bonapartism would be transitional toward fascism, the total break of finance capital with the parliamentary mask. The present ban on demonstrations and the impending threats to the right to strike, through deregistration of the Seamen's Union. could mark the first steps to Bonapartism if

the economic crisis seriously disorganises mining and farming in Australia. Immediately, however, these measures complement Queensland's position as the state most subordinate to imperialism in the Australian Federation by bringing its political organisation into line with its economic subordination to overseas capital, increasing the "stability" of Queensland for finance capital. The most colonial economy has the most open police repression.

The few fake Trotskyist groups which have attempted some kind of Marxist analysis of Queensland - represented in Queensland by the Communist League - predicted from the beginning of the international slide downward to depression that economic crisis would lead to the rise of a "strong state" - an expression unknown to Marxism - which would first of all attack the unions. The Australian ruling class which knows how to utilise economism to maintain itself in power, instead kicked aside its democratic pretences to attack a government supported by the workers and to curtail further the possibilities of demonstration occasionally sanctioned by the police. The fake Communists, always anxious to show their true worth, immediately announced democracy was a sham, so that democratic demands didn't matter - as if the demands for the right to strike and the right to picket were not also democratic demands! It is now all too clear that in Queensland the ban on demonstrations was a first step to an attack on the Seamen's and metal workers' unions. The union leadership which refused to break the law on demonstrations in order to fight the law — leaving the students, as usual, to bear the brunt of police violence - will shortly face bans on pickets and strikes themselves. Not much can be expected from Stalinist bureaucrats like those in the Seamen's Union who will only fight Utah Mining in order to take jobs from Spanish seamen to give them to Australia - the kind of chauvinist policy Petersen would endorse if he were a union bureaucrat. (Seamen's Union publicity, in fact, calls Petersen a "pawn of the multinationals" implying that if he saw his interests rightly he would support trade union chauvinism!) This attempt to appeal to the old "White Australia" Queensland of the nineties against the 1977 Queensland of Petersen ignores the fact that the victory of the National Party is a result of the old Queensland Labor Movement's retreat from socialism to racism. The Seamen's Union leadership, however treats all political questions, from the socialist demands of jobs for all workers to the democratic demand of the right of assembly with the same contemptuous answer: we will not fight. But now, the rights of assembly have been abolished, the right to picket will be threatened, not only the seamen's politically incorrect dispute with Utah, but the Metal Workers justified economic dispute with Utah will take place, in a situation where the traditional militant methods of politicising strike demands - marches, pickets, outdoor meetings - are under attack, along with the left which has used these rights to organise politically. The union bureaucrats faced with all out fight with the Petersen government, are digging their own grave. They have allowed the possibilities of taking their case outside the immediate unions involved into the political arena to be thrown away without any serious counteraction.

It is necessary to organise continuous and deliberate violations of the ban on demonstrations. Attempts to orchestrate protests against the ban in terms of the pitiful remnants of legality remaining to demonstrators will be met - as happened last week - by such police provocations as attempts to arrest people using megaphones to disperse the "legal" demonstration.

The formation of a Civil Liberties Committee is a step not toward, but away from, this goal. The political perspectives of this committee are epitomised by its alliance with one wing of the Baptist Church to organise a "respectable" demonstration in terms of the special "norms of Queensland"

If the police permitted the Baptist Church to march, but not the left, what would have been gained? A committee which treats the ban on marches as a single issue isolated from all others in Queensland and which includes no representatives from the unions, except union bureaucrats is totally useless in terms equally of politics and class composition. The working class cannot rely on any other class for its self-defence.

The existing left forces in Queensland have all chosen this moment of crisis to show the depth of their bankruptcy. The two conflicting wings in the "civil liberties" campaign offer a choice between an alliance with the petty bourgeoisie of the Baptist Church or the petty bourgeoisie in Friends of the Earth. Which will be the more "respectable" from, they argue. In Brisbane, as elsewhere, however, history is not changed by Baptists or nature freaks but by politically organised workers. Petersen's election campaign, directed against the coalition Liberals offers the Stalinists and fake Trotskyist collaborationists what should be a dream run. According to them the small "1" Liberals should rally round either the anti-uranium issue or against foreign capital (Utah) and allow the left wing to unite with the "sensible" capitalists. The outbreak of industrial struggle between the seamen and metal workers and Utah Mining will however, immediately dissolve this chimera and unite the Liberals and the Nationalists in defence of the rate of profit. No section of the right wing will in any case defend the left when it is as isolated generally and from the working class as it is now in Queensland. Only the organisation of workers to build democratic rights on a more secure basis than they have even been before in Queensland or Australia can defeat the Petersen ban by proving that the left, without making alliances with other groups, can develop the strength to defend its traditional methods of struggle. Without this ability to defend itself no political grouping can or will be taken seriously.

It is already clear that the most militant elements among the students cannot by themselves muster the force strong enough to successfully defy the new laws. The union bureaucracies idea of raising the economic struggle to a political level is a chauvinist campaign against Utah Mining, not a struggle against the capitalist state linking democratic to socialist demands in a transitional programme. On such issues as uranium, however, sporadically and unevenly, workers are beginning to see the need to organise themselves on a basis politically independent of the union officials to fight the attacks on them. The unions have so far proved powerless, in the present pro-depression situation, to ward off. In the 'thirties, workers fought repression of free speech primarily through their organisation in the Communist Party, only secondarily through the unions. Workers in the party systematically violated bans on free speech. This political activity led later to unions taking up the issue and a concentrated attack on reactionary legislation, based on the working class, being made. Political organisation of the most conscious workers thus led to forms of union mobilisation, rather than the other way round - union bureaucrats will never mobilise unions without a politically aware and organised rank and file. This experience of the 'thirties can and must be repeated, but without the Stalinism that has enabled the existing Communist Party to obliterate from its memory, its successes in the past.

A workers' revolutionary party has to be built to combat Petersen's attacks which threaten the possibilities of political and industrial organisation. This party will be built around the demands corresponding in Australia to three basic slogans of the Russian Bolshevik Party: a democratic, centralised republic, without separate state governments; the nationalisation of the land through the expropriation of mining companies and big graziers, control of the land being vested in committees of small farmers, farm workers and the black community; and a sliding scale of hours

and wages to stop unemployment to share the available work around at wage rates increasing with the cost of living. These demands can only be achieved by a workers and small farmers government.

BUILD THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY!

The next major step in the evolution of the labor movement in Queensland, to counter the serious threats it now faces, must be the formation of workers' self—defence units for protection, not only of trade union activities and demonstrations by left groupings, but also student demonstrations against state violence. This necessarily involves stronger political organisation of class conscious workers. It is the major activity around which the nucleus of a revolutionary communist party can be built in the state.

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