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The National Question. A time bomb for the Soviet Union

Armenia and Azerbaijan are neighbouring republics within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Armenia is Christian. Azerbaijan is Moslem. Within Azerbaijan there is an autonomous region, Nagorno Karabakh. The population of Nagorno Karabakh are Christian and Armenian. They want to join Armenia. In early July the 101 elected representatives of the local Soviet voted for unity with Armenia. Their requests were overruled by the bureaucrats, both in Azerbaijan and also in Moscow. The Nagorno Karabakh Soviet and their Armenian supporters hoped to resolve the question peacefully within the frame work of the Soviet Constitution. There have -been no anti Soviet placards in the demonstrations held in Yerevan, the Armenian capital and many of them held pictures of Mr. Gorbachev to indicate their loyalty to the new direction he is taking with the Soviet Union. Article 70 of the Soviet Constitution guarantees the right of self-determination. However, Article 78 prohibits changes in boundaries between republics without mutual consent. There is no way that Azerbaijan will give its consent to the loss of territory. Therefore, Article 70 is only a token acknowledgement of the Leninist position of self- determination. Real right of self-determination does not exist for nationalities within the Soviet Union. As the bureaucrats treated the will of Nagorno Karabakh people with contempt, the demonstrations gained momentum. The bureaucrats responded with brute force. One eyewitness, an artist, Kurung Nagabetyan, was quoted by western media as follows: "All of a sudden they started shooting. They were carrying clubs like policemen in the West. They beat people right and left." The protests developed into strike action. During July there was a general strike throughout Armenia, which paralysed all factories, public transport and Yerevan's Zvartnots airport. Throughout July the whole of Armenia was brought to a standstill. Thirty-six people were killed. Much of the Armenians' anger was taken out on the Azeris, the natives of Azerbaijan living there. Many of whom crossed the border. However, in Azerbaijan race riots were occurring against the Armenians. In one town twenty-six of them were killed. In the Soviet Union today there is much talk of democracy, freedom and openness. From their treatment of the Nagorno-Karabakh people we can learn just how far this goes. The bureaucracy has treated their demands with contempt. Mr. Gorbachev attacked the leaders of the unification movement as 'enemies of his reforms who stuffed their pockets' We think this is a Stalinist slander. However, even if so, characterising the leaders in this way is only a substitute for a chauvinist opportunist for dealing with the political questions they raise. The right of self-determination for Nagorno Karabakh should be supported, irrespective of the motivations of some of the people advocating it. The national oppression of Armenians in Azerbaijan is real. It is not something manufactured by opportunists. According to Radio Moscow, Mr. Gorbachev directed the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet to 'reaffirm the existing realities'. This they did, pointing out that any alteration is unconstitutional. Although it did acknowledge that Armenians within Azerbaijan have been neglected and urged 'immediate measures' to improve Nagorno Karabakh into an enclave under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. Towards the end of July the strike movement, both in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, was dying out with 85% of the workers returning to work (according to official reports). But make no mistake, the national question will not go away as long as their national grievances remain.

It is not just in Armenia and Azerbaijan that the national question is of significance. Recently, in the past few months, there were massive upsurges, demanding more autonomy in the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Rallies numbering hundreds of thousands have demanded autonomy

and independence from Moscow. The suppression of Poland by the Red Army has hardened right wingers to gain support under the banner of the Polish nation. The national question is a time bomb for the Soviet Block (those post capitalist states dominated by Moscow). The Soviet Block is going to pay very dearly for repudiating the Leninist position on the national question

The Public Sector. Under attack!

The spectre of privatisation is haunting Australian politics. And not just Australian politics. Throughout the capitalist world governments are debating how much of the government sector should be sold out. The Lange government has just sold the Bank of New Zealand. The Thatcher government has sold British Airways and Telecom. These giant steps stand out. However, everywhere there has been smaller actions, such as the handing over to private contractors of mail runs. Privatisation is a full-scale ruling class campaign and their agents are sharpening up their ideological knives to sell this campaign to the general public. For John Howard, privatisation is a great chance for Australians to own part of their public utilities. Of course, the Australians he has in mind are people such as Alan Bond. For the Right Wing of the Labor Party, especially Paul Keating and Gareth Evans, privatisation is something which has to be done. 'Why should money which could be spent on welfare be spent on the Commonwealth Bank and QANTAS? At the ALP conference privatisation was defeated, however this does not mean the end of the war. Evans and Keating haven't given up. What the Left is struggling to defend (and struggling is the word) is the existing public sector. Gone are the days when massive government expansion was seen as the solution to everything. The existing public sector is of course part of capitalism. The Communist Tendency has no interest in either propping up capitalism, or in being party to a privatisation campaign, which is part of the ruling class offensive. To define and fight for a working class interest we have to have a clear understanding of how capitalism operates and the public sector within it. Capitalism is a system where the means of production are on the whole in private hands. Significant nationalisations are often made in times of war when individual interest must be subordinated to the bosses' collective interest of fighting the enemy or, alternatively, in third world countries where the bourgeoisie is weak (countries such as Mexico and Egypt). These are exceptions. Capitalism is a system where the means of production are privately owned and whose aim is the maximising of the extraction of surplus value which is converted into profit. It is the laws of profitability which determine in the final analysis how capitalism operates. In an economic crisis it is those parts of the economy which do not make profit which are attacked first. However, society does not exist by profit alone. The capitalist class must defend its nation and expand and protect its interests globally. This requires a defence force. The ruling class must also maintain internal stability against threats to their property. This requires a police force. There is no way that this part of public sector spending will ever come under attack. In fact, both Labor and Liberal Parties have plans to expand it. They know that as the crisis deepens working class youth, who are given no future by the system, will steal from the rich and fight back. They also know that when living standards drop workers are likely to respond with strong industrial action, which could get out of control. That is, unless there is a state to repress them. Any government which attacked this part of the non-productive sector of the economy by depriving it of funds would be disposed of promptly. Also, there is that part of the economy involved in the circulation of money. This includes bankers, investors and speculators. This is actually growing, as manufacturers seek to divert their capital elsewhere. In Australia, where manufacturing is weak, there is a housing crisis, thanks to this money being diverted into land speculation.

The main area of non-production sector under attack is government enterprises, such as the commonwealth Bank, QANTAS and Telecom, and also the welfare sector. These are capitalist institutions introduced to maintain the stability of the system. Capitalism as a system often needs utilities that individual capitalists cannot produce themselves at a profit. For example workers have

to be healthy and need shelter in order to produce. If no boss can produce these, the government steps in.

Industries have been nationalised in some countries, because they are seen as essential for the national economy, but are operated inefficiently by the private sector. This is why the coal industry was nationalised in Britain. Governments have also nationalised to head off struggles of the working class. In Britain, social security was introduced so that workers who lose their job could have enough to keep them healthy for the next employer. In Australia both social security and an expanded social welfare system were developed and expanded after the Second World War. Australia had a labour shortage and it was necessary to attract migrants. If there was no social security they were hardly likely to come across the world to a new country where conditions were worse than at home.. Also, Australian soldiers were demanding decent social services as a reward for their patriotic loyalty.

All of this occurred when capitalism was booming. After the Second World War there was the greatest expansion of the productive forces this century. It fooled many into thinking that state intervention could overcome the contradictions of capitalism. Australia developed industrially after the Second World War under the umbrella of tariffs and protection. But government intervention also maintained it in a state of weakness. Tariffs and protection also play off workers along national lines. Jobs in Australia are counterposed to jobs in (for example) the Philippines. The result is a divided working class unable to fight the system internationally.

The working class gain from welfare, but it is also a mechanism for policing us. The Department of Social Security controls where unemployed people live. If an unemployed person moves to an area where he or she is unlikely to find a job, he or she may be removed from benefit. Inspectors, nicknamed "sheetsniffers" pry on single parents to determine whether they are living with a member of the opposite sex. As the money for benefits decreases, the more institutions such as Social Security become police agents. We, the working class have an interest in defending the public sector but not institutions which police us. What we are defending is the funding and not the structure of the institutions. Therefore these institutions must be challenged by workers control. In the case of Social Security, this includes the unemployed who are their clients. It is through unity with the unemployed and social security staff that attacks can be fought. But this unity cannot be cemented as long as Social Security staff are part of the state machinery which attacks the unemployed

The public sector under capitalism is inefficient. It is inefficient from two points of view. It is inefficient in obeying the laws of capital. It is inefficient in serving working class people. Of course, we have no interest in being efficient in terms of the capitalist economy. We must argue for trains that run after midnight to Newtown because people need them, not in terms of how much money is made. In fact, we must reject the capitalist economy as a frame of reference. If we accept capitalist profitability as our yardstick we end up joining the razor gang, as the economists establish that the economy cannot afford 'luxuries' such as the dole - in other words, what is basic to our survival. However, we must realize that any government committed to administering the system must obey the system's laws and be committed to 'economic responsibility', which means balancing the budget. And to do this it will cut back on welfare. We, of course, will defy the bankers, but we will also prepare the working class to form a government based not on parliament, but working class power. Privatisation will intensify the attack on working class and poor people. Under private control Telecom, Australia Post and the Commonwealth Bank will be more efficient at undermining Trade

Union conditions and cutting back on those aspects of their operation (decreasing though these are) which are a service to the community. 'Responding to market forces efficiently' means increased bank charges for Social Security recipients, cutting out trains to Newtown after midnight, cutting down on the production of medicines for the treatment of A.I.D.S. and charging the poor exorbitant fees for child care and therefore excluding poor people. Privatisation, therefore, must be fought, but in fighting it we must not apologise for a public sector which is totally inadequate and in many circumstances attacks us.

In the early eighties the Richmond Report was introduced with the aim of reforming the psychiatric hospital system. The emphasis was to be on community caring for patients. This, however, was a cover for serious budget cutbacks. The campaign against the Richmond Report was led by former State Nurses Association Secretary, Jenny Haines and her ally fake Trotskyist bookshop owner, Bob Gould. Their campaign, not merely fought cutbacks, but argued against any changes to the psychiatric system as playing into the hands of the Richmond Report. Psychiatry, as it exists today, means a barbaric attack on many poor victims of the capitalist system. A decent community health scheme would require more funding, not less. The Haines/Gould campaign, in the name of fighting funding, became apologists for this brutal barbaric system.

The public sector is inefficient in serving us. Even the Health Scheme introduced by the Whitlam Government called Medibank was inadequate. What we have today, a health insurance fund called Medicare, is ten times worse. The Department of Housing is hardly efficient at housing people. There are plenty of houses vacant, yet there are thousands homeless. The railways hardly provide an efficient rail service. We could go on. Australia performs badly in relation to the public sector because it is a colony with a constitution which inhibits major social reforms. Australia will break from imperialist control only when we overthrow capitalism. Australia will only have a decent public sector when we overthrow capitalism,

Nick Origlass Federal Art squatters and Pabloite revisionism

On the fifth of June fifty squatters and supporters confronted Leichhardt Council to get support. Whilst some of the councillors were more prepared to co-operate and suggested that evictions should not go ahead until an enquiry was completed. However, the squatters met with strong opposition from the Mayor, Nick Origlass and his supporter, Izzy Wyner. They demanded that the squatters honour the agreement they made four years ago and get out immediately. The Council wants the land now occupied by the Federal Art Squatter to expand the parkland at the end of Glebe Point to extend right up to the foreshores of White Bay. No doubt this will make the view more panoramic and therefore make it a more attractive proposition for Trendies and Yuppies to buy homes in the immediate area. This will mean more profits for real estate agents and developers, who will use the better environment to raise the land prices. It is these people whom Nick Origlass is acting in the service of. He has deserted the poor and exploited for the upwardly mobile middle class. Yet he has the gall to "be surprised that the squatters use the Bicentenary when often they are at the forefront of struggles against development". It is easy to score revolutionary points at their expense. They don't claim to be revolutionaries. But, despite their ideological weakness, they are defying the attack on low income housing and not like Nick Origlass, a party to it.

The Communist Tendency has no illusion in councillors, even those that claim to be progressive. Origlass and Wyner are behaving like hundreds of other councillors, although worse than many Left ALP members who would at least pretend to be concerned and perhaps even make a token effort to do something. This act of treachery is noteworthy because Origlass and Wyner represent the degeneration product of those who in Australia aspired to represent the Traditions of Trotskyism in the Thirties and Forties. The Communist movement has had plenty of deserters. There are many who find for them the grass is greener on the other side. Origlass and Wyner represent not so much as a desertion, but a degeneration. Theoretical weaknesses, like bruises, have developed and now the whole fruit is rotten. Origlass and Wyner deserve credit for standing up for the name of Trotskyism. In Australia, as well as elsewhere, the Stalinist Communist Party was hellbent on vilification of Trotsky, because he stood for world revolution and against bureaucratic privilege. The Stalinists repudiated world revolution to defend bureaucratic privilege. This was especially important during the second world war when the Stalinists repudiated Trade Union struggle for the war effort. The Trotskyists with whatever faults stood up for class struggle during the imperialist war. For this they deserve an honourable place in working class history. Australian Trotskyism developed in isolation from the world movement and it is of no surprise that it had weaknesses. Nick Origlass, in his article in the New Internationalist 1938, stated that every strike represent a break from reformism. It is very easy from such a statement to deny the party and only support strike action. Nick Origlass has stated that he "never believed in a transitional stage" (the dictatorship of the proletariat) and always in direct workers' self management (in a discussion with a member of Communist Left). It is no accident that he gravitated towards the Pablo tendency within the Fourth International. After the second world war the Fourth International was put to the test with the Soviet Union's advance into Eastern Europe. It failed. First it argued that there could be no change in social relationships (nationalisations) as a result of the invasion. When it was clear that this was not the case its leaders (especially Michel Pablo) developed a new theory where objective forces could force Stalinist, reformist and nationalist parties to become revolutionary. While the majority of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International adhered to this method, the Pablo Tendency took it to its logical conclusion by arguing that the Fourth International should not exist and sections should carry out deep entrism into reformist, Stalinist, and even nationalist parties. The task of revolutionaries become, according to Pablo, one of radicalisation, mobilisation and fighting for democracy and self management. The Pablo Tendency repudiated the struggle for independent revolutionary politics and leadership. For Nick Origlass this meant digging into the Balmain Branch of the Labor Party. The Fifties and Sixties saw a massive growth in living standards. This assisted the Right Wing of the Labor Party to harden their control over the working class and conservatised them. There was also alternative seriously trying to break them away. Where Nick Origlass got his basis of support was in the resident action movement. Of course, a large component of this movement is working class and many of the actions carried out in the Sixties and early Seventies were in the interests of working class people. However, the resident action movement did not define a working class interest. The leadership of this movement was the radical middle classes. Of course, this does not mean we abstain from them when they involve working Class people. However, a working class interest must be fought for within them. No matter how superficially militant the radical middle classes may appear they have material ties to the system. It is these ties that they will often defend often at the expense of the working class. For Nick Origlass, radicalisation was seen as an abstraction independent of material interest. In fact, he lost any concept of class. The working class of the Sixties had TV sets and

refrigerators and were better off than the middle classes of the Forties, Without a Marxist analysis of the long boom s came to see this fact and effectively wrote off the revolutionary potential of the working class in Australia, Seeing radicalisation independent a material interest and writing off the working class because of its relative material affluence led to his desertion to the middle class Nick also failed to see that the working class politically organised in the Balmain area were predominately a labour aristocracy, The degeneration of Nick Origlass was a long process. It has taken time for his petty-bourgeois politics to develop and their anti-proletarian character to be clearly exposed. Today in the eighties the middle class stand for increased trendification and improved property values and Nick Origlass supports them, even if it means kicking of squatters.

Internationally, the Pablo tendency as been party to far more serious betrayals. For example Michel Pablo, humbly assisted by Denis Freney played a major role in integrating the organisations of self-management (which were strong in Algeria in the sixties) into the Ben Bella capitalist state. Pablo's leading role in liquidating capitalism internationally has reinforced Stalinism and nationalism in many parts of the world. Compared to these betratal, kicking out Federal Art squatters seems small. It wouldn't so minor if you were one of those deprived of a home. Every home for working class and low income people should be defended.

What is significant is what class Nick Origlass serves. No doubt there will be plenty of others kicked out courtesy of Origlass and Wyner putting parkland and trendies before working class housing. . Political and philosophical struggle, such as the struggle against Pabloism often seem abstract and irrelevant as compared to the "real struggle" such as the physical defense of squatters which of course has to be fought. However if there had been a consistant struggle against Pabloite revisionism in this country, Nick Origlass may have ended up fighting with the Federal Art Squatters and not against them.

DEFEND JIM GILBERT

Jim Gilbert is Black and a former organiser for the NSW branch of the Builders Labourers Federation. On the 11th of March he went into the Newtown RSL Club. He was brutally bashed, after challenging the doorman/bouncer to explain why his Marrickville RSL badge did not permit him to enter the Club after 8.30 p.m. The attack was severe. Blood came out of his ears. He has suffered from persistent headaches and has had trouble eating.

Jim Gilbert is taking legal action against the Club, but has approached the Union of the Unemployed, the Squatters and Tenants (U.U.S.T.) for political support. The U.U.S.T. has organised pickets outside the Newtown RSL every Friday and Saturday night since the beginning of July. The U.U.S.T. has also approached Trade Unions to support a boycott of all services to the Newtown RSL and to support our picket as long as adequate compensation is not given. The Communist Tendency, which has been active in the U.U.S.T., has fully supported the pickets and this course of action.

The U.U.S.T., whilst happy to initiate action, consider it the responsibility of the whole of the Left and of every working class organisation to stand up against racist attacks against the Black people. There is an imperialist war against the Black people which is going on every day. It is a war where we,

the working class, have a responsibility to take an active stand with the Black people against the imperialist state. If we turn a blind eye to the bashings and murders carried out by the racist system we become accomplices of the system. This means that we cannot consistently fight the system when it attacks us. Both the U.U.S.T. and the Communist Tendency consider that working class people, including the unemployed, have a class interest in opposing racist attacks.

Unfortunately, the Left and the union movement has, on the whole, ignored our campaign. Some trade unions have given some moral support which has not been translated into action. The Federated Clerks Union refused to listen to any request not coming from its membership. The Liquor and Allied Industries Union categorically refused to support any picket which might inconvenience its members. On the Left the pickets have been supported by The Fightback Committee and some members of the Committee to Defend Black Rights. This lack of support is disgraceful , but not surprising. The Left shares the White Australian chauvinism which dominates the labour movement.

ADEQUATE COMPENSATION FOR JIM GILBERT!

BLACK BAN NEWTOWN RSL!

WORKERS DEFENCE AGAINST ALL RACIST ATTACKS!

not just here but internationally. The defence of the public sector has to be linked to a programme which fights the capitalist system.

Privatisation is one of the few issues where there is a real division between Left and Right in the Labor Party. Very few issues define Left Wing in the A.L.P. these days and hardly any one advocates socialism. However, privatisation is one issue that the Left is adamantly against and the Right categorically for. The Right argues that the economy cannot afford the capital required to subsidise QANTAS and Telecom. The Left counters by pointing out that these are profitable, that it is the private sector which is more responsible for Australia's foreign debt and that the campaign for privatization is a plot by greedy multinationals who have their profit hungry eyes on our nation's services. The lines vary, but what has been outlined are the views of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist—Leninist) as expressed in their pamphlet 'Protect Australia's National Assets'. This pamphlet acknowledges that the public sector is state capitalist and ends with the programme Defend and Extend Public Assets, Make the Rich Pay, Fight for an Independent Australia. It is true that 70% of Australia's foreign debt is caused by the private sector. However, this does not obliterate the fact that, because of Australia's foreign debt, there is real pressure on the Federal government to be economically responsible and balance the budget. Under private ownership denationalised public Institutions would be more profitable because they would cut back on services and on their workers' wages and conditions more ruthlessly. The CPA (ML) point to the profitability of QANTAS and Telecom in order to blind people to the fact that these institutions, to continue as is, require an influx of capital. The CPA (ML) lacks a revolutionary strategy for the public section. In the name of fighting the multinational's plans it apologises for the existing system which it acknowledges as being state capitalist. It probably thinks that pointing out weaknesses would mean giving ground to the multinationals. For revolutionaries the alternatives are not the existing public section or privatisation. The dynamic of the economic crisis means that the existing public sector is not really an option. The only way the public sector can be adequately defended is if it is transformed into really serving the working class. This can only be achieved by workers control, which must be linked to a programme for the overthrow of the capitalist system itself.