

# Rank and File News

*An attack on one  
is an attack on all*

## The Politics of Solidarity

Issue 35  
1 November 1998  
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in this issue:

militant unionism . lead-ry . our ethics  
serious injuries . the power of whiteness

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# Rank and File News

was first published in Brisbane in 1991 by rank and file unionists who had been active in the SEQEB power company lockout.

The magazine was produced to assist workers in their struggles, at work and outside. Industrial campaigns were seen as completely linked with the fight for freedom and justice in daily life. From 1992 *Rank and File News* was produced in Melbourne.

*Rank and File News* promotes the interests of workers and oppressed people to organise collectively to take power in their own lives and in society. We support the development of networks of communication and solidarity between different areas of struggle. We work to build organisations that are uncompromising and at the same time respectful of different positions, to fight for our interests. We work to make our interests real.

An end to economic exploitation. An end to social oppression.

## centre X

Recent *Rank and File News* issues contained a number of articles detailing efforts to set up an Organizing Centre Social Centre in Melbourne. On 7 October the discussion group that has been promoting this work held a meeting which established an association with an agreed constitution to continue developing this project.

The association is called XOCSC (X Organizing Centre Social Centre) Association. The aims and principles of the association are defined as promoting collective decision-making, self-organisation and direct action against capitalism, to realise a non-exploitative society.

One of the first tasks of the association will be the establishment of the Organizing Centre Social Centre as an actual space that is friendly and useful to people who want to develop the discussions, networks and resources necessary to advance our collective struggles.

Membership of the association is open to all people who agree with its aims and principles, and abide by the rules of the association. The direction of the work of the association is decided by members in general meetings. An elected management collective has the task of running the association on a daily basis.

*Rank and File News* supports the process of developing the Organizing Centre Social Centre, and we hope that the association will be a valuable asset to help us decide collectively how best to share our resources and work.

For any other information regarding Centre X, please contact us c/- *Rank and File News* or email [xocsc@xchange.anarki.net](mailto:xocsc@xchange.anarki.net)

## Contents

Editorial .....	3
Telsta Dispute .....	4
ETU Interview .....	5
Lead-ry .....	9
Health & Safety .....	11
Our Ethics .....	13
Call Centres .....	15
Minimum Income ..	16
Race .....	17
Rural Crisis .....	22
CD Review .....	23

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Membership of the Rank and File News Collective is open to all people who support its aims and principles. Membership fee for one year is \$5 / \$2 / \$1. Members have voting rights to decide the priorities of the Collective, they elect the editorial team, and participate in the production and distribution of *Rank and File News* and *rfn*.

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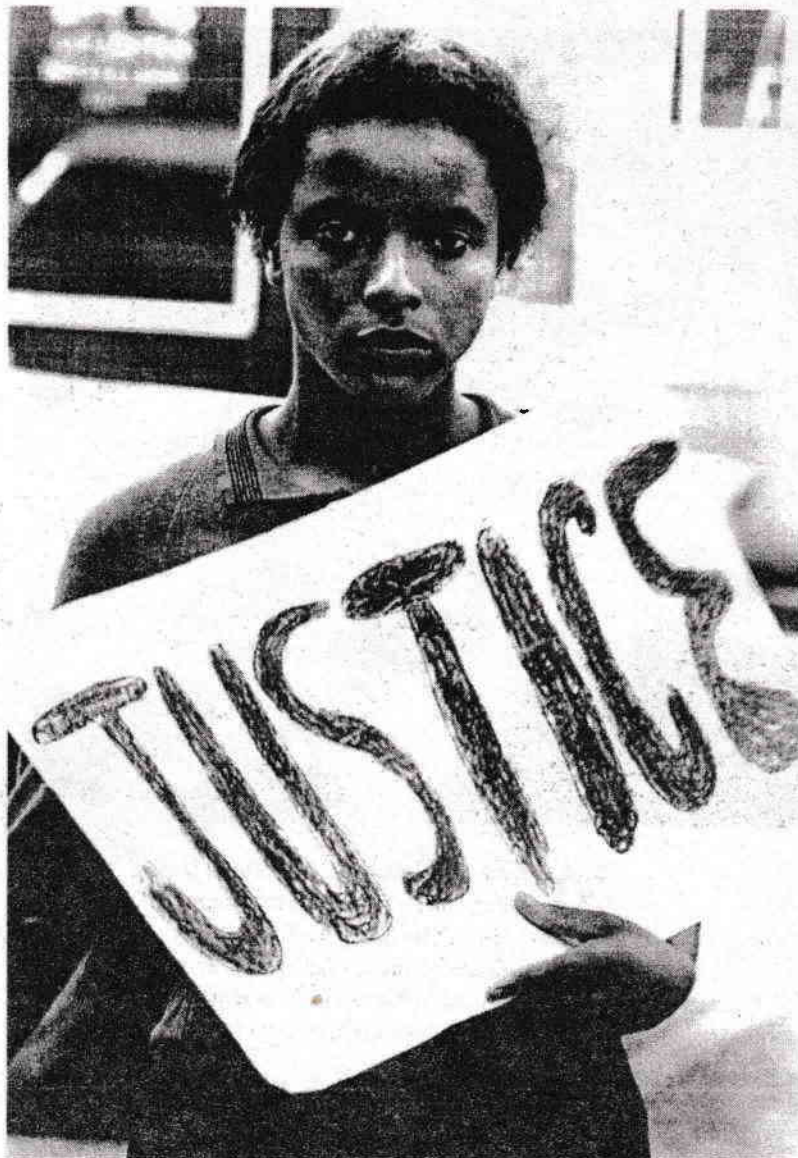
The the cover photograph of three workmates was taken in New Zealand in the 1980s



*"one needs perspective, not attitudes;  
context, not anecdotes;  
analyses, not postures."*

Toni Morrison

# editorial



Over the past year *Rank and File News* has undergone some changes. These have mostly been changes of emphasis and style rather than major shifts in direction. Yet this has been enough to arouse some suspicion and confusion about our politics. We thought it was time to say something directly about what we are trying to achieve.

*Rank and File News* was first published in Brisbane in 1991 by rank and file unionists active in the SEQEB lockout. It has been produced from Melbourne since 1992. *Rank and File News* has always tried to link issues of exploitation and work to questions of oppression and justice in other spheres of life. It has always been a forum for those dissatisfied with or hostile to existing forms of party based organizing. *Rank and File News* has always been activist based and committed to giving space to a range of radical views.

We have come to think that one of the central aims of *Rank and File News* is to provide a forum for political debates and discussions that are going on around us. Discussions and debates that go on every day in pubs, cafes and tea rooms and largely stay there because there are so few public spaces that allow us to come together and share our experiences and concerns. We want to promote discussions that take stock of where we are, that give us a sense of what is going on, that are concerned with where we go from here.

The *Rank and File News* editorial collective is not a party, nor is *Rank and File News* a party paper—and most of us don't aspire for it to be. That's why we

sometimes publish articles that none of us agree with. We publish them for a range of reasons—because they might offer practical examples which could be taken up in another context, because they help to establish the parameters of a debate, because they raise provocative issues and questions that deserve consideration. We don't want to tell our readers what to think.

This doesn't mean we have no politics of our own. The way we decide what will be given space obviously reflects our own histories and perspectives. We make no apology for this—it could not be otherwise. But we are not smug and complacent. We are open to be challenged or joined by others with different histories, experiences and priorities.

One of our aims in *Rank and File News* is to bring together activists from different political trajectories who don't often communicate directly or work together. We are committed to forming practical alliances and networks of struggle and communication as a way of putting into practice a non-sectarianism that isn't just a muddled anything goes.

We are committed to rethinking those old certainties—about class, parties, communism and power—that appear so fossilised and oppressive now. We are committed to working with others who want to do this too. We are committed to the on-going struggles against capitalism and the state and for dignity, freedom and justice.

The Editorial Collective

The quote is  
from Toni  
Morrison,  
Race-ing  
Justice,  
En-gendering  
Power, 1993

Picketing the  
Courthouse,  
Munroe NC,  
1961





# hanging on

All bans have been lifted. Talks ... now ... should take place in a different environment." Do I smell a deal in the wind? CEPU officials have called off action because of threatened legal action, rising costs of supporting members who had been stood down, and movement by Telstra to drop some of their demands and negotiate seriously.

Wages, non "allowable" conditions and Telstra's wish list of givebacks have been the issues, but anger and disillusionment at cutbacks, contracting out and down sizing have been the underlying force. Talks began in August 1997. Our last pay rise was in March 1997. Mass meetings in September 1997 resulted in some action, notably a 24 hour strike in Business and Government, but that was canned after legal action and some concessions by management.

This year, after all agreements with Telstra expired, we had an extended period of action. It started in August with rolling 48 hour stoppages. These were well observed in the Technical area, with varying responses in the Lines and Operator areas. The "Linies" State Secretary, John Brown, refused to send out a directive to members to stop work, because he didn't think there was enough support. They went out in other states. This reflects an ongoing battle to throw out the management stooges in that part of the union.

Striking is a new tactic forced on us by the Workplace Relations Act. Bans on maintenance leading to network failures have traditionally been the highest level of action.

The dispute has been lacklustre. Support has been solid, but mostly without real enthusiasm. A variety of bans, mainly in network maintenance, have had some impact, but a lot of workers were being stood down. The stoppages did create a feeling of solidarity—or at least of shared loss.

One colleague replied, when I said we were really fighting for the union to have any say in future, "management will win in the end, you know—even if

we win this battle."

I guess it is the same as the MUA. Fighting for damage limitation on conditions and a halfway decent pay rise is not like going on the offensive for shorter hours, etc. So many redundancies and contracting out make the future look grim. People are in "change fatigue"—sick of the treatment, but not seeing a way forward.

NDC (my area) has 7,000 workers nationally designing and installing switching and transmission equipment, cables, etc. Local management are desperate to get us into a 100% or 49% subsidiary. This will let them compete more effectively with private sector conditions (38 hour week instead of 36.75, freedom to hire and fire, etc). They are negotiating a separate EBA for us, with higher wages and worse conditions.

Workers are almost convinced that there is no future for us in Telstra, but management may get a big shock over the number who want to go to the new company. Management want 70-80% to go over, but many will prefer redundancy. The package on offer is fairly generous. When you add the superannuation in, it looks good to people with long years.

This sort of thing is taking up more of people's brainspace than commitment to industrial action.

Dragging out the action and being ultra careful of the legalities, has sapped the momentum. After the 48hr stoppages, an escalation of the action was expected. Instead, most of the members were involved only in harassment.

It is hard to see how we can win the central demand—rolling all the non-allowable matters into an agreement—from here. Management have backed down on most of their givebacks. To restart the action now would be difficult. I don't think the leadership or the members really have the will for it.

**Richard Lane, CEPU T&S Shop Steward**

Telephonist,  
Trunk  
Exchange,  
Australia, 1957



# the hard way

## **Piergiorgio Moro interviewed Dean Mighell, Victorian State Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union for *Rank and File News*.**

*Can you briefly review the industrial disputes at Spotswood, Citipower and Docklands in relation to what the disputes were about, the tactics used to win and the gains from those disputes.*

Spotswood was very important to us. The workforce there had a tradition of unionism that went back one hundred years as they had had to fight for all the conditions they had received. ACI Glass tried to break the union by initiating a dispute in the middle of winter, at a time when bottle production was at its lowest, and locked out the workforce. Our stewards there were very good and read the situation very well and organised a lock in, generating a lot of support among the local community and other unions. Once the police removed them, a picket was put in place and even though it was regularly broken by some TWU members bringing trucks in and AWU maintenance members who kept working, it was very solid. The police, at every shift change, made sure that the trucks got through until one morning when the workers got tired and decided to hold the line in front of the gate by forming a human wall.

The police then made a determined but unsuccessful effort to break our line by the use of batons and horses. As they were gathering re-enforcements, we mobilised a lot of the surrounding workplaces, and with the help of other unions such as the Metals, we got 1,000 workers there within the hour. I think it was the first time we

used this tactic. I actually think this was a defining moment in industrial relations and taught us some of the lessons that we later used in the MUA dispute.

The lock-out lasted 105 days before winning it. We won it because of the quality of our organisers, the support from other unions and workers. We lasted longer than them because we had the will and the discipline to win.

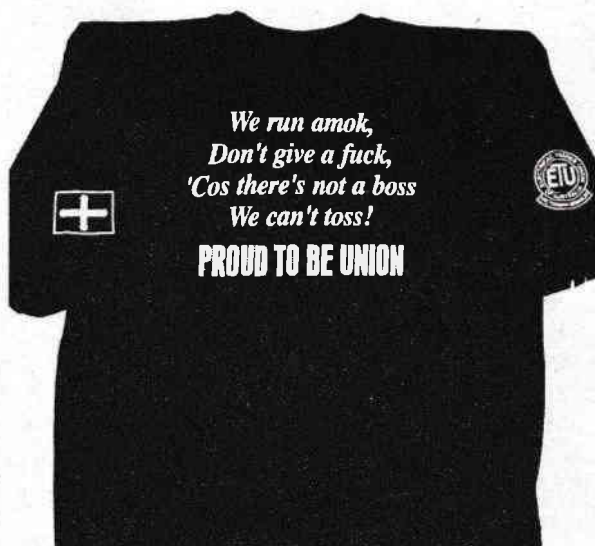
Citipower was a different dispute although the initial dispute was again about destroying workers' conditions, like a 9 day fortnight and RDOs, and smashing the union. The company thought that they could win as they saw the old SEC as a weak workforce with no real history of union militancy.

***"It was long, it was tough, it was violent, but we held on to win."***

Again, it was the discipline shown by our members, our strategy and our ability to keep 24 hour a day pickets that won the day. The support from other ETU workers and contractors was fantastic. We were fighting every law in the land, we had Supreme and Federal Courts injunctions against us, directives from the Industrial Commission. We had to defy all of those and just pursue the victory the hard way. It was long, it was tough, it was violent, but we held on to win. The dispute went for 107 days. In the end it was a pyrrhic victory as before Citipower took over we had 560 workers employed to do maintenance work. Currently we are down to 38 workers.

For the Docklands dispute, we had bans on for over 5 months. We sought support from our membership by calling a mass meeting where we discussed the issues of the long term tenure of employment, a nine day fortnight and the question of overtime. We wanted to set a limit to the overtime allowed as otherwise people would just keep on working, making a mockery of the nine day fortnight. It is the first time I have seen a construction agreement that limits overtime. This will definitely create jobs. We have set ratios between apprentices and trade workers, and also between younger and older workers so as to spread the work around.

This was mainly an ETU victory and the support that we received from our members at the mass meeting was great. Mass meetings are the ultimate decision making bodies of our union. Our members respect these decisions totally as they know that we, the officials, respect these decisions as the will of the union members. For our members a directive from a union official is worth



T shirt, ETU



nothing compared to a decision that has been discussed and taken at a mass meeting.

*What do these wins represent for ETU members and their willingness to organise and fight for their rights in the future?*

I think they will. All the workers that contributed money to the strikers became part of the dispute themselves. For instance during the Spotswood dispute, we had 400 CEPU workers from the Casino project march to the headquarters of the owners of ACI, in support of their striking workers. We hope that disputes like these are creating a climate of solidarity and support among workers at different work sites and industries.

The MUA dispute, irrespective of the final outcome, was an enormous victory for unionism. It took all the experiences of other preceding disputes and made the Maritime dispute a walk in the park.

Thus, as long as union officials handle them the right way and involve the members and the wider union membership, these big disputes are a great thing for the development of a consciousness of unionism and class. *How does the ETU organise in a climate of on-going deregulation and out sourcing?*

I don't think organising has ever been more complex and difficult as it is now and many older workers wonder how we cope in relation to what they faced in their time. In reality the laws have never been worse for us, and are designed against us. We sometimes find it really hard to get into un-unionised workplaces. We have to fight very hard to not only be able to represent the workers employed at that site but also to look after the interests of the contractors that companies now use.

Thus we have broadened our net by trying to make sure that these companies only use unionised contractors or those who are covered by EBAs. Some of our biggest disputes have been in relation to the conditions of these

outside contractors and therefore we are achieving and establishing an industry standard. Once a standard is recognised by workers in the industry, it becomes very easy to talk to and organise workers as they can easily see if they are getting less than what they should be getting.

In some ways, it has become a better organising tool than the lazy days of the Accord when there was a trickle down effect from a decision arrived at by the Industrial Commission. We certainly prefer being out there with our members achieving these gains. We think it is an advantage to us as it has changed the culture of the way we organise.

*What about the involvement of young workers and apprentices in the union?*

We have had some very good instances in trying to unionise group training companies in Victoria that employ hundreds of apprentices. It is very difficult to get to these companies but in the last couple of years we have got an agreement on the application of a pay rate award with 26 of the 27 group training companies in Victoria. This has been a lot of work. Now we are after enterprise agreements that contain wage increases. The companies are fighting this like hell. But for instance one company Victech, that has over 400 apprentices, we have unionised about 95% of them. We use mass meetings to get our message across to them.

***"We wear with pride the tag of a militant union. We see the ETU as part of a team, part of an army that is fighting a war."***

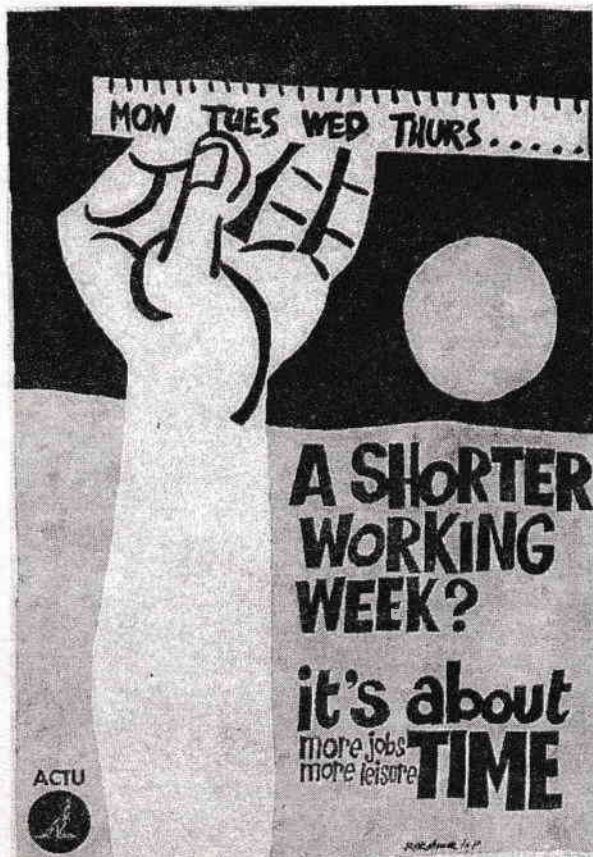
Even though there is a bit of a culture in our trades area that young apprentices should not be in a union or involved in union activities, the reality is that they are workers, and even if their needs are a bit different, we feel that the day you start work is the day you should join the union.

*The ETU is seen as a militant union. What role do you see the ETU as having in relation to less powerful unions, to un-organised workers and the unemployed in general?* We wear with pride the tag of a militant union. We see the ETU as part of a team, part of an army that is fighting a war. Many other unions may not be militant but they represent workers with different cultures and with different industrial strengths. We are not powerful everywhere but collectively we can do well together.

For instance, we feel that if a union is in struggle, the ETU will offer support wherever and whenever it can. Thus we don't have to have members there, we can ensure that no electrical contractors go on site, no maintenance is done, fund-raising and other various supporting activities.

I really do think that in the last few years there has been a change in many unions with the bureaucrats and the lazy union official gone. Members want good grassroots, strategic, strong disciplined unionism that involves them and they are changing their leaderships to leaderships that are more committed to the collective approach. I think for us this is good.

Our commitment to the unemployed is to create jobs and these days you have to beat employers over the head



ACTU poster, 1981



***“Racism is a trade union issue. ... You’re not a unionist if you’re a racist.”***



to take on apprentices, to take workers over 45. As well, we have to argue with some of our members not to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week because in the end you are just taking jobs away from other people. So if we can try and hold the 9 day fortnight and decrease the standard hours of work, then I think it creates a bit of an example and it gives some hope to the unemployed that the union movement collectively has not forgotten them.

Most of our members know what it's like to be out work for long periods and you wouldn't qualify as a union official here if at some stage of your working life you hadn't been blacklisted and experienced what it is like to be unable to find work.

*In your description of the Spotswood dispute, you mentioned about other unions not observing your picket line. What is your opinion/relationship to such unions?* Some unions will not go out of their way to influence their members not to cross another union's picket. At the time it hurts and you get bitter and you want to find non union ways to get even with them. I think over time you have to convince other unions that you will help them.

For instance our relationship with the Transport Workers Union post the Spotswood dispute. When they've been in strife, we thought that it could be payback time but you really wouldn't do it. The workers who are there had no role in crossing our picket line at Spotswood. So we go and help them and hopefully the leadership see that the ETU is helping them and next time they will help us.

Unfortunately, some union officials, some unions, don't understand the politics of what goes on out there and the importance of solidarity across unions. It's a trade union crime to cross another union's picket and you've

just got to educate them.

*What role does the ETU play within the Victorian Trades Hall Council and the ALP?*

We really love the Victorian Trades Hall Council and see that as a critical part of maintaining solidarity with unions. Leigh Hubbard does a fantastic job as Secretary and has demonstrated so in many disputes, the MUA dispute being the latest one.

***“The ETU, in conjunction with some other good progressive unions, is drafting an ALP industrial relations policy ... The response will define the question of whether the ALP is a trade union based party or not ”***

We're a part of a team in there and try and play a constructive role. It's a good place to learn things, share information and build solidarity. I hope the union doesn't ever lose the likes of the VTHC.

The ACTU doesn't rate a mention so I won't worry about that.

The ALP are a little bit different. We agonised over affiliation quite frankly. The Federal election before last we questioned severely whether to affiliate or not. I see a real shift in the ALP. There are many people in there who see the British party as their ideal where they don't involve trade unions.

Many of the processes within the Victorian ALP are corrupt, there's branch stacking, all sorts of stuff. Unless

**Land Rights and anti uranium demonstration, 1978**



the ALP gives itself some hope and cleans up its act, it's condemned to a fate where it certainly won't involve unions and won't encourage normal members who want to fight for political changes, for social justice issues. I think it will leave a huge void that will need to be filled.

So our relationship with the ALP is fairly tenuous and we evaluate whether our \$50,000 affiliation fee is worth the money. It's a lot of money. Could this be better spent? We determine that from time to time.

The ETU, in conjunction with some other good progressive unions, is drafting an ALP industrial relations policy. We are going to put this to them. The response will define the question of whether the ALP is a trade union based party or not. I think it is a question that our members will expect to be answered. The document will contain stuff like removing section 45D&E, the right to strike, job security, employment creation and a whole lot more.

We have never been backward in coming forward and that's how it should be as any democratic organisation should not be frightened of criticism. At the last branch conference we were frowned upon and I was told my political career was finished because of a certain thing I have done, but then I'm not interested in a political career.

My aim is to represent the union and see that the ALP supports its own objectives like socialisation of industry and be the political wing of the trade union movement. I think more unions should speak up about the direction of the ALP as there has been a policy void in the last few years and it hasn't done the party any good.

*What input should unions have in wider social/political struggles, such as the Jabiluka Mine, against racism etc?*

I think the unions have a role to play because of our contact with so many people and our ability to educate people on social and political struggles. The social and political struggles that unionists face in their workplace are linked to the social and political struggles that we find when we oppose the Jabiluka mine or when we tackle the issue of racism.

Racism is a trade union issue. No-one can tell me otherwise. How can you call yourself a trade unionist if you view a worker as someone less than you or with less entitlements than you or as deserving less dignity than you. You're not a unionist if you're a racist.

On the broader issue of the Jabiluka mine, the union can offer a lot of support in sending delegates there, sending fraternal greetings, sponsoring people up there. Just this week we sponsored some musicians to go up there. We can do a bit but, of course, unions have not got a lot of money, but where we can we offer support such as running things in newsletters and talking about why it is important to oppose the Jabiluka mine and what the politics behind it are. That's what we have got to tell our members and while some would say who cares, it is important to explain the political reasons why we oppose the mine because the mainstream media won't tell our members.

*Is it hard to debate such wider political issues within your membership?*

Yes, quite often members don't want to hear anything unless it effects them, which is a bit sad but it is something

that we have to continue to plug away at. You know, it's surprising if you put your newsletter in a format that is friendly or encourages them to read it, and you mix the issues up and introduce some political content. People will start to read it.

At your steward meetings you can talk to your stewards, who are the most influential people in your workplace about these issues, e.g. about how racism is a union issue, and educate and influence your stewards on how they think about their unionism, their workplaces, then you can debate these issues.

It all depends. If you get on your soapbox and give them the big rhetoric, these days it doesn't work and most workers switch off. We have think how we go about it.

*In conclusion, what is your opinion on the entry of the Victorian police union to the VTHC?*

That was an interesting one. Having been intimate with a number of police officers in some of our recent industrial disputes at the wrong end of the horse or the baton. That was an interesting debate, do you bring them in and influence them or do you say you have no right.

During the MUA dispute some people said how terrific the police were. I don't think that the police were particularly terrific, I think they were outnumbered and they knew it, and for them to extract us would have been massive. ACI would have looked like a drop in the ocean. We all knew what could happen. Because we had numbers we knew we were protected.

So police and industrial relations. I can only hope that their affiliation can be used to create a greater awareness of trade unionism among the police. There are a lot of police officers that I've spoken to privately that have a lot of sympathies for trade union issues, but it's how police officers can be used by the state to break unionists that breaks our heart.

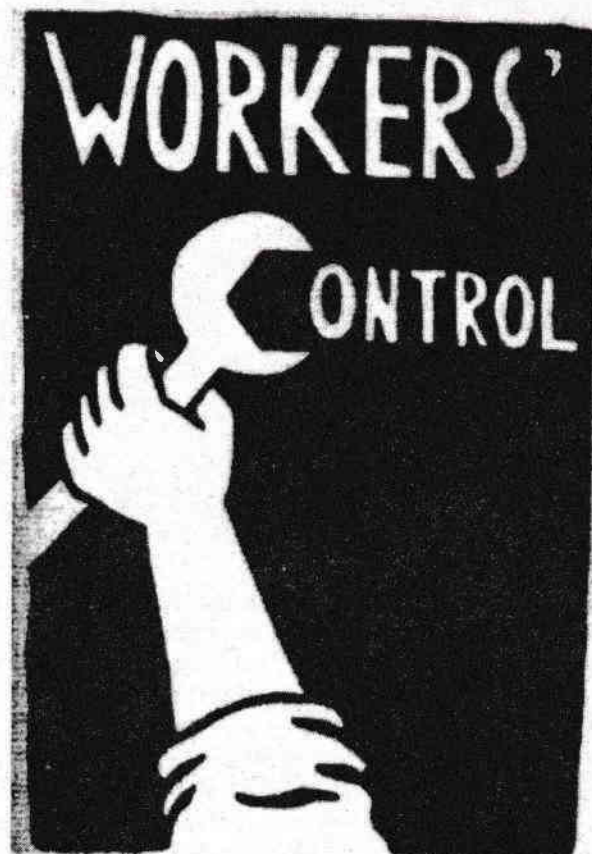
In conclusion, the ETU represents a lot of electricians, communication and manufacturing workers. We are not only at the militant end of the construction industry. There are a lot of our members that are on awards, that had to fight for the right to be in unions. The ETU is a very diverse union. We are not an elite but part of a greater struggle, and I hope that never changes for us.

I hope that in a few years when the differences between the Labor party and the conservatives are much bigger we can build that awareness among our members and in the next couple of years of adversity we can really use it to build a stronger and more determined union movement that we have had before.

I think it is a fantastic time for unionism. We enjoy the struggles and the wins at the moment, the determination and solidarity. Our members are becoming better unionists and are understanding more of the struggle. Sometimes the more they try and kill us the stronger we get. We have around 20,000 members, of which 18,500 are presently in work.



# lead-ry



We take this opportunity to share some thoughts and actions with you.

What is known and propagated as struggles of wage-workers are centralised, unifocal struggles fought on the basis of a factory, branch or region unified around a charter of demands. We have participated in some of these kinds of struggles and are acquainted with many covering a period of twenty years.

We have come to realise that these are pre-meditated traps laid down by managements, unions and state-apparatuses to implement policies of work-intensification, retrenchment, wage-cutting and the degrading of working conditions. These struggles are in fact struggles of managements, unions and state-apparatuses against wage-workers because:

- control of wage-workers through representation and delegation is ensured;
- the deceptive power of the negotiating table is imposed;
- a focused target for repressive apparatuses is provided;
- demands of unity ensure that different opinions are erased and voices of dissent are muzzled;
- insulation and isolation from wage-workers of other factories, branches and regions is ensured; and
- the dispersion of wage-workers is facilitated.

A few examples to clarify.

## **Bombay Textile Strike, 1982-1983.**

In 60 textile mills, 250,000 workers were unified under a militant leadership around a charter of demands. The result—to retrench 90,000 workers and close down old mills in order to sell their premium lands. Under normal circumstances it would have taken more than 10 years to achieve this, whereas through the strike the policy was implemented within one year.

## **1977-1979 in Faridabad.**

Sporadic multi-nodal outbursts of worker discontent in hundreds of factories. In October 1979 unions jointly called a mass meeting. Around 100,000 assembled. Atmosphere surcharged. Railway trains forced to stop. Indiscriminate firing by well-prepared police and paramilitary forces. Normal functioning of factories from the next day. The industrial belt functioned smoothly for the next few years.

## **Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad, 1982-1985.**

To keep the company competitive, management policy was to retrench one-third of the 3,500 workforce and to increase workloads through agreement with the militant union. The opposition of the workers prevented the implementation of the agreement and the union was discredited. Six months later management and the union engineered a three month long tool-down strike on the pretext of a delay in the payment of wages. The legitimacy and control of the union was re-established. Negotiations were carried on behind closed doors to reach a new agreement which was also rejected by the workers. The union leadership was now thoroughly discredited. New faces were brought forward in the union to implement the retrenchment policy. Worker opposition did not allow the new union leaders to be effective. 1,500 workers were forced to sign resignation letters through open repression over a one year period.

## **East India Cotton Mills, Faridabad, 1979.**

Automation was to be implemented. Management needed to retrench 3,000 out of 6,000 workers. A strike was called by the union for a one per cent increase in bonus. Militant strike, lot of violence, 3,000 workers dismissed.

## **Lakhani Shoes, Faridabad, 1983, 1988, 1996.**

Three major strikes by three different unions. Every time

Britain, 1969



violence and militancy. Each time all the workers were dismissed. Lakhani shoes has registered a very rapid growth in output. Number of company factories increased from three in 1983 to twenty-two in 1997.

Some detail about steps that our comrades are taking along with their co-workers.

Workers at Jhalani Tools have not been paid their wages from March 1996, i.e. for 19 months now. What is unfolding is a well tried out plan of management to grab as much of the workers' legal dues as possible before the closure of the factory. Along with the outstanding wages, provident and pension scheme funds, service gratuity money, years of leave bonuses, travel and dress allowances and other items are not paid and company properties are sold off with managements taking heavy cuts and commissions. This has been a routine exercise in a large number of factories in Faridabad and other places.

The dominant schema is when a factory "becomes" sick and closure has been decided, management through union leaders instigate strikes, violent incidents and long drawn out civil and criminal court cases (15 years is very common) to achieve the final dispersal of workers' resistances. During all this, closure is very actively camouflaged. In the rare cases where court cases have been finally decided in the workers' favour and the workers are at hand to take their legal dues, there is no property in the company's name to pay. Banks and taxes gulp most of whatever remains.

In this scenario, workers at Jhalani Tools have opened up a way for newer modes of struggles to fight out this management-union-state administration schema. This in our opinion has wider ramifications for wage-workers.

Through silence and passivity 2,000 workers exhausted the union leaders well tried out methods of provocation around tangential issues. Four groups of leaders have come and gone, banging their heads against this mode of worker resistance.

With mounting legal dues and increasing hardships, workers hesitantly started looking for alternatives. Initially a small group of workers on their own demanded their backwages from the state labour department officers. Slowly, in affinity groups of eight to ten workers, applications increased. And very soon the working of the labour department and district administration was almost jammed when 300 small groups of workers separately started approaching the officers. Legal obligations of separate dates and hearings were done away with, but talking to hundreds of workers at the same time was also impossible. Like the management, state officials desperately tried to foist leaders on workers. Faced by workers' stubborn refusal to accept anyone as their leader, state officials also tried their best to instigate workers to violence but failed. Then the management tried to divert attention by summarily dismissing workers. Even when this number reached 100, the workers neither made leaders nor took to violence.

With management, union leaders and state officials exposing their complicity, Jhalani Tools workers have started taking very simple steps to take their case to their 300,000 co-workers in Faridabad. Again, overcoming hesitations, some workers in small groups of eight to ten with hand written placards stood along various roads during morning and evening shift hours and at factory

gates during lunch hours to engage in discussions with workers from other factories. The response of workers at large has been tremendous. What we mean by tremendous is that because of this small step workers at large are becoming wary of the common sense consensus that if you "do your work, you will get your wages at the end of the month." The everyday nature of the step and their persistent presence in the social space questions the very premise of wage-work amongst increasing numbers of wage-workers. Dispersed, multi-nodal conversations are emerging about the urgent need for modes of resistances that involve large numbers of workers taking small, everyday, routine steps without leaders. Interesting ballads lampooning leaders and hailing the power of everyday mute resistances are emerging and we are circulating them through our monthly paper.

Management, union leaders and state officials are finding it difficult to instil fear in workers at large as appropriate targets for their terror tactics are not available. The dispersed and spread out nature of the workers resistance does not provide the unifocal targets desired by apparatus of control and repression. More difficult than the small numbers of workers on the roads is the problem that the straight, silent faces of workers at large are posing for the bosses. An additional difficulty for the bosses is workers' refusal to go to the courts despite all the specialist advice they have been given.

An interesting metaphor circulating amongst workers at Jhalani Tools looks at the unity of bees as the cause of their loss of honey. Bees united in a hive can easily be put off by smoke and their honey taken away. But if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares to touch their honey.

Looking forward to furthering this discussion.

**KK/Collectivities**, Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T. Faridabad, 121001, India  
Email: revelrytion@hotmail.com

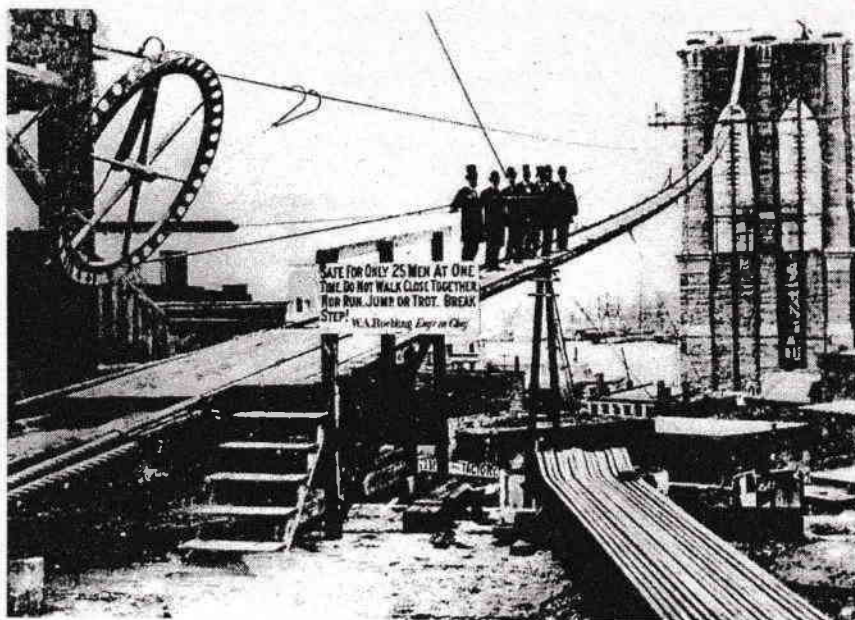
*Opposite*  
**Construction of**  
**the Brooklyn**  
**Bridge, New**  
**York, c1877**

**Foundry**  
**workers, New**  
**Zealand, 1978**





# insults and injuries



*"As skill with the shears improved, so did the size and weight of the tool. Bigger and heavier blades gave a smoother finish. Some weighed more than 50lb...Some apprentices who had worked alongside the croppers had been known to collapse, their hands running with blood, after only a few hours of the work."*

Robert Reid, The Luddite Revolt of 1812.

As soon as the Liberal Party won government in Victoria in 1992, they replaced the Occupational Health and Safety Commission, the Accident Compensation Commission and the Accident Rehabilitation Commission with the WorkCover Authority.

Under the previous system, injured workers received payments based on their previous income, for as long as they were unable to return to paid employment.

The new system that was introduced with WorkCover stated that if the injured worker still had some capacity for work, the payments would stop after two years. The injured worker could then try to get a job, or go on the dole, or try to claim sickness benefits. This change caused the immediate loss of payments to 6,000 workers with long term injuries. Overwhelmingly women, many of them migrants, they had been damaged by years of repetitive work in the factory or office. They received their letters on Christmas Eve, telling them payments had now ceased.

The new laws introduced a new definition of "serious injury", involving a 30% whole person impairment. So for example, the amputation of a leg above the knee was considered a serious injury, and the injured worker would receive 90% of their previous employment wage as payment. But an amputation of the leg below the knee was now not classified as a serious injury. This caused payments to be stopped after two years. These changes allowed only those workers who had lost all capacity for work to maintain payments after two years. And there were still other legislative changes, including the removal of many stress claims from eligibility. Again this affected women disproportionately.

Together with the scrapping of holiday leave loading, these cruel changes were the first attack by the Kennett government against the workers of Victoria. This was followed by the sacking of thousands of public employees, the selling off of schools, the privatisation of utilities, and the closing down of hospitals and emergency services. So injured workers were simply the first group hit by the government in its cost cutting measures.

Of course the cost cutting measures still left thousands of

workers receiving benefits, plus a constant stream of newly-injured workers from all sectors of industry. So the government began a new process of attacks against injured workers.

In December 1996 the definition of serious injury was changed to exclude psychological injuries from the calculation of whole person impairment. This meant that more workers were defined as not having a serious injury.

But there were many workers who were so maimed that they were still listed as having a serious injury, and so could receive payments indefinitely. In November 1997 the category of serious injury was simply deleted. Payments to injured workers were harshly cut back, from 90% of the previous employment pay rate, to 75% of the previous base rate for workers who had totally and permanently lost their work capacity. The base rate excludes overtime payments, bonuses and allowances, which make up a large part of wages in many industries, so this can be a very low payment.

But only those workers who have totally and permanently lost their work capacity could receive the 75% rate. The rest would still only get 60% of their previous employment base rate, which stops after two years. After that, the work test to get the dole, or if eligible, sickness benefits.

In November 1997 another major change totally removed the possibility of workers who had been injured because of their employer's negligence suing through Common Law.

This means workers are specifically excluded from having legal rights available to all other people. In practical terms this means that a consumer who had to buy an electric frypan because of the Longford gas refinery explosion in September can sue Esso to recover the costs, but the workers who were injured and sustained horrible burns are excluded from suing Esso, regardless of any possible finding of negligence that may be determined by the government inquiry into the disaster.

Another aspect of the laws is that if a worker is injured by a machine that is faulty, the worker cannot sue the manufacturer of the machine that caused the injury. But the employer can sue, to recover the costs of stopping production because of the accident, and even to recover the costs of having to advertise and hire a new fully able bodied worker.

It gets more interesting still, in that if the injured worker is taken to hospital, and is injured further because of medical malpractice, even the doctors are beyond being sued, because workers can't sue if they are hurt because of their work.



The new laws introduced the Australian Medical Association Guide to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment as the only standard to determine compensation. These standards bear no relation to work capacity, and they have a threshold limit to disqualify many workers from receiving compensation. Injured workers must now demonstrate a 10% total body impairment to receive any lump sum compensation for their injury. This means that a worker who has one arm partially paralysed will receive no compensation, because the partial loss of movement in one arm is not 10% total body impairment. Or in another example a worker who was burned in the Longford gas refinery explosion, and who was left disfigured on the face, neck and arm, would not receive any lump sum compensation, because the injury would be considered only 6% impairment.

Physical pain and psychological suffering caused by having sustained an injury are specifically excluded from the calculation of impairment.

One more example shows the wide effect of the new laws: A woman worker who has a crush injury resulting in a total

and safety.

Employers need not fear a health and safety inspection from WorkCover either: Esso received a backdated approval for their operation after their refinery blew up. Transfield Obayashi (builders of City Link) were fined only \$25,000 for negligence that resulted in a worker being buried and drowning in mud.

This situation is clearly very serious, and action by workers is necessary. But it is hard to organise injured workers who are in pain, or in shock, who are often isolated and very busy just surviving.

It hard to organise a fight against the government on WorkCover because the legislation is wrapped in bureaucracy, and it attacks workers one at the time, as they get injured, as they get treatment, as they challenge the bureaucracy that administers the WorkCover laws.

Unions in Victoria have been conducting a campaign against the attacks on injured workers. There have been general strikes and there have been demonstrations. But the campaign so far has not been successful in defeating the Kennett government attacks

***“a consumer who had to buy an electric frypan because of the Longford ... explosion ... can sue Esso to recover the costs, but the workers who were injured and sustained horrible burns are excluded from suing Esso”***

hysterectomy is now considered 30% impaired if she's under 30 years old, but 0% impaired (and deserving no compensation) if she's over 50. Injuries that cause impairment in sleeping, or doing housework, or having a sex life don't necessarily attract compensation.

All these changes have shielded employers from compensating workers who are injured while working. WorkCover insurance premiums have been dropping, in line with the reduced payments to injured workers. This makes it cheaper than ever for industry in Victoria to develop work processes with little regard for health

against injured workers.

We will need a new campaign that recognises that we face a government that shows hatred and contempt towards workers. A campaign that protects the rights of workers on the job, and that achieves some real compensation when injuries do occur. And we must make sure that negligent employers who cause workers to be injured are punished for their crimes.

**Manrico Moro**

*Statistics from Victorian Trades Hall Council publications.*

## reasonable people

What a pity everybody in society can't be reasonable, prepared to settle for a sensible compromise which allows for all parties to gain something from a dispute. A few days before the election we had seen a gas explosion in Gippsland killing two workers, seriously injuring others and bringing society to its knees under the shock of cold water.

The Premier, one of the reasonable people in our society, said it was good for us, that good would come of it, that it wasn't a crisis. The media agreed. The *Herald-Sun* carried front page pictures of people sharing electric showers, for instance, coming out on the day the gas was to be turned back on with the line “it will be the end of a brief but heart-warming era”. The non-crisis had been socially cathartic.

I thought of what the Premier and the media might have said if the workers and the unions had created the stand downs and the loss of income for employers and employees by bringing the state to a standstill though industrial action against, say, workers being killed and injured in a gas explosion.

Imagine the righteous attacks, the references to Trades Hall thuggery and union blackmail, the recourse to the courts to sue the unions and the individual workers for all that they were worth.

Quite simply the reasonable people in our society are the

employers, and those working class people who recognise that the employers are reasonable people. The extremists are the unions and workers who would destroy the viability of our delicate economic order by demanding more and more when the economic crisis that is permanently with us in one form or other—be it high interest rates, low interest rates, high inflation, deflation, recession, globalisation—there's always something demanding that reasonable people call for reasonable responses like a moratorium on wage rises, the removal of crippling work practices, the lowering of costly health and safety demands, the need to work longer hours for lower pay.

The reasonable people, which of course, includes men of balance like Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer, know that if you label unreasonable people long enough and often enough some of the reasonable mud will stick. I hate to be the iconoclast, but it strikes me that to call someone who says “do not touch that environment, leave it alone” or who says injured workers or the families of killed workers should have legal rights are extremists is, heaven forbid, about as extremist as you can get. Or as sinister.

**Kevin Healy**





# ends and means

The small size of most Leninist/Trotskyist organizations active on the Australian left, has led many to see themselves primarily as propaganda groups. The primary tasks are to recruit members to the group, to keep it functioning, to educate members and to spread revolutionary ideas. Some also see their task as exposing the political inadequacies of those who currently hold the allegiance of the working class—the Labor Party, trade union officials, etc.

Many of these organizations (which I'll call parties) would talk about there being a dialectical relationship between recruiting to the party and strengthening the wider movement. In practice though, emphasis swings between these two poles. At present we seem to be in a "party building" phase, as most of these groups attempt to take advantage of the political fluidity and disillusionment so much in evidence now. Success is being measured in terms of numbers—how many recruited, how many papers papers sold, how many motions gotten up at a union delegates meeting.

The level of competition between these organisations and the narrow parameters of that competition, have made more obvious some of the limitations of this kind of "revolutionary" practice. I'd like to focus on some of the ethical implications of these political strategies and to discuss these in a concrete, practical way.

Ethical problems aren't only an issue for the Leninist/Trotskyist parties. This is just the milieu I know best and one which I've regularly come into contact with in recent times. Over the past few months there has been public discussion among activists involved in the Jabiluka blockade about issues similar to those I want to raise (see <http://www.users.bigpond.com/Takver/soapbox>). There are difficulties with these kinds of criticisms because of the risk of harming campaigns and organisations and of providing ammunition for those who are hostile to our political work. However it is important that we continue to create spaces to critically analyze

our political campaigns. Not factionalism or oppositionism just for the sake of it, but a passionate engagement and a self reflexivity that works to prevent our analyses turning into ideologies, our practices turning into rituals and our anger turning into self righteousness.

What follows are a few examples which suggested to me that many everyday ways of doing political work fail in ethical terms and, in fact, are deeply sectarian in that they put the interests of the party before the wider interests of the class and the struggle.

***"... many everyday ways of doing political work fail in ethical terms and, in fact, are deeply sectarian in that they put the interests of the party before the wider interests of the class and the struggle."***

At the first Campaign Against the Nazis demonstration in Fawkner last year, the rally was called to shut down the National Action bookshop. There weren't discussions about direct action tactics within the Campaign meetings, rather the plan seemed to be that if the crowd was large enough, a push through the police lines could occur. The police lines were strong and the "leaderships" made their own assessment that a charge would be reckless. It was predictable though that some in the crowd would not be so strategic in their thinking. Some were arrested and some were hurt and many were caught on video throwing missiles and jostling with the police.

It was distressing to me to see that the demonstration set some of its participants up to be cannon fodder. Attracted to such a role are usually angry, hurt and

Homeless woman in Kiev, 1998



vulnerable people, often very young. No attempt was made by those organizing the demonstration to protect—physically or politically—those participants most likely to experience arrest and police violence.

During an Campaign Against Racism demonstration against One Nation in Frankston, a small group of young anarchists gained entry to the hall and disrupted the One Nation meeting. They were forcibly evicted from the hall, some were hurt and one was arrested. The police tried to marginalize the group—telling those standing close by that they didn't know which side the anarchists were on or if they were really nazis. As the arrested person was taken to a police station some distance away, the organizers of the demonstration strongly resisted allowing the anarchists access to the speaking platform and wouldn't provide help to collect the person in police custody.

Earlier this year in Sydney a small group of high school protesters occupied the Prime Minister's office in a Resistance organized anti One Nation action. The protesters were forcibly evicted from the office, some were hurt and some were arrested. All seemed distressed and confused at the heavy-handedness of the police.

***“Parties who recruit on the basis of appearing to be a demonstration's ‘militant minority’...can't afford to sound conservative.”***

When I asked a person in the leadership of the DSP about this, he said that the DSP and Resistance had no way of knowing the police would attend. They have, however, been in existence since the 1960s. These kinds of stunts are designed to raise the media profile of the organization in order to draw in new members. I wonder how many of those on the front line of this action would have happily gone along with this tactical thinking.

What is our responsibility towards those who come to the demonstrations we call and organize? What is our responsibility towards those who do things we disagree with politically—particularly if we provided the forum for their actions and could have seen the likelihood of their actions? At an anti One Nation demonstration in Dandenong last year a person attending the meeting was bashed by people attending the demonstration. Protest organizers and other “leaders” were quick to denounce the action in the media. But I did not see those individuals or the organizations they represented attempting to prevent this situation from occurring.

This does *not* mean I am advocating “cop marshalling” whereby people are physically prevented by marshals from protesting in ways they have chosen, neither do I advocate structuring actions like a trades hall demo, where every possibility for initiative or radical action is foreclosed by the way the rally is organized. However the alternative to oppressive hierarchies between the “leaders” and the “rank and file”—where a small group makes the decisions and use the threat of physical force to ensure that those decisions are not challenged—is not a structureless anything-goes.

The accusation that it is undemocratic to organize

for demonstrations—rather than allowing them to happen “spontaneously”—is often used by Leninist/Trotskyist organisations to discredit those calling for more accountability. This leads to situations like the anti One Nation demonstration in Hawthorn, where no organization or alliance would take responsibility for organizing (as opposed to calling) the demonstration. No PA was found for the demonstration, there was active resistance to marshalling, there was no open platform for speakers, no first aid, no formal coordination. Everyone wanted their hands free to make their pitch to the demonstration in the name of their own organization.

In a different political culture, the lack of an organizing collective/committee wouldn't be a problem—if enough of us looked out for each other, kept cool and acted to keep the demonstration strong rather than unproductively setting sections of us against others. This isn't what happened at Hawthorn. Instead young students from a Jewish secondary school became distressed trying to stop a dodgy-acting, provocative man from seriously assaulting a One Nation supporter (a photo of which of course ended up on the front page of the *Herald Sun*), while members of Socialist Alternative egged on demonstrators who were physically harassing One Nation members as they left the aborted meeting, even though SA supported letting individuals leave (the main slogan was “racists go home”). Parties who recruit on the basis of appearing to be a demonstration's “militant minority”, however can't afford to sound conservative.

Against the claim that organizing for a demonstration is restrictive and undemocratic, I would argue that we need to develop forms of organization which allow us to take responsibility and be accountable to each other for our actions. What would this mean in practical terms?

The strategic and tactical aims of demonstrations or other actions need to be clearly and openly discussed. If the aim is to blockade, then we should organize for a blockade, if the aim is to physically shut down a shop, we should organize for that. It sets up confusion, is undemocratic and it is asking for unnecessary and harmful injuries and arrests to publicly call for the shutting down of a meeting, when what is envisaged and prepared for is a noisy, boisterous demonstration. Perhaps we could experiment with public pre-demonstration meetings, where strategies and direct action tactics can be discussed, such as occurs in Germany before large actions.

Structures need to be put in place so that those who are arrested or injured are the people who have made an active decision to place themselves in a situation where this is likely. Demonstrations and other actions are very often predictable. We are often able to make a good assessment of what kind of reaction to expect from police in a given situation.

Much of the left has a low level of commitment to those who are arrested and charged as a result of campaigns we have organized. None of us should be seen as expendable, the consequences of facing court and of imprisonment should not be romanticized or taken lightly. This is imperative when arrests are being used by a campaign as a conscious strategy. We are not all equally vulnerable—some of us are protected by our parents' wealth, by good prospects, by white skin or by a middle



class education—some of us are not.

An attack on one is an attack on all. Divisions between us are actively cultivated and used against us. The police work to isolate elements they have assessed as likely to cause trouble. Often police will make these assessments on the basis of clothing styles, demonstrating styles, those whose actions seem unpredictable. Groups of young people who are likely to already be subject to

***“We need to continue to search for ways to work together...We have a responsibility to each other.”***

heavy policing will attract close police attention at demonstrations. Police often attempt to intimidate and provoke reactions out of these groups. At later Campaign Against the Nazis demonstrations we noticed that these kinds of tactics ceased when demonstration organizers made it clear they would not allow sections of the demo to be picked off by police (even to the extent of ringing the police and objecting to the harassment). This kind of practical solidarity has helped to create a basis of trust and on going work.

**Zelda D'Aprano  
demonstrates  
for equal pay,  
1969**

We need to continue to search for ways to work together on the bases of solidarity, responsibility and accountability, rather than opportunism and sectarianism. We have a responsibility to each other.

**Julie Tisdale**



## call centres

By the year 2000 hundreds of thousands of workers worldwide will be employed by telephone call centres. It is becoming the new version of the assembly line.

Continually under stress, closely supervised to the extent that supervisors often listen to calls, insulted by angry clients, call centre workers are one of a new generation of workers whose numbers are multiplying thanks both to technological innovation and the falling cost of telecommunications. A new generations whose working conditions bear a suspicious resemblance to the assembly lines of the early industrial era.

If you telephone a call centre, it will probably be a woman that answers. In most centres, three quarters of telephonists are women and many are under 30. Based in industrialised regions where unemployment is particularly high, the call centres are a godsend for thousands of workers back on the job market. The employers' main incentives are the low wages, economies of scale and the simplicity of installation. Call centres can shift work to regions with lower wages. In the United States toll free calls are directed to the Caribbean. In Great Britain call centres have enabled enterprises to transfer staff away from the most expensive regions such as London or south-east England.

In many call centres everything is aimed at speeding up the pace: incoming calls must be responded to within fifteen seconds, the conversation must be kept as short as possible and, to add to the stress, each operator has a

console in front of them with flashing lights which indicate calls that are waiting.

The new communications production line poses many challenges for the trade unions. In some industries the call centres are an obvious threat to jobs, as the New Zealand financial workers' unions have found. In replying to a questionnaire, they summarised the situation as follows: "clients are encouraged to use the telephone rather than go to their bank and their call will not go to their branch. Many banks have closed down branches and cut jobs."

On the other hand, the growing use of call centres in other sectors is a source of new jobs. Jobs which can regenerate regions that have been brought to their knees by mass unemployment. Trade unions therefore need to develop a strategy that aims both at protecting existing jobs where they are under threat, and at organising workers in the new call centres.

**International Confederation of Free Trade Unions**  
<http://www.icftu.org>





# time for a guaranteed minimum income?

After a surge of interest in the 1970s, critical responses to the large-scale job losses resulting from technological change have been slight for over a decade. The issue has become the subject of renewed debate recently in a number of books and articles and also the focus of practical struggles on the ground.

Historically, technological change has decimated employment in agriculture and manufacturing. The supposition (until now at least approximated over the medium term in industrialised countries) has been that new opportunities for employment will arise in the technologically restructured economy. Recent mass sackings in the finance industry, the promised source of new mass employment as little as fifteen years ago, have brought this supposition into severe question.

Whilst the prospect of new sources of mass employment may be held out as the eventual outcome of current economic restructuring, mainstream politicians and commentators seem reconciled to increasing inequality as its immediate consequence. Huge numbers of workers ejected from previously well-paid, secure jobs must now make do with part time, casual or other insecure employment.

Whilst technology has caused massive unemployment in mass production, a much smaller, highly skilled and highly paid workforce is required for the production of "niche marketed" products. Many of these workers work inordinately long hours. All this when the promise of the 1970s was of technological change permitting vastly reduced working hours and the elimination of boring, repetitive jobs.

Even moderate politicians and commentators have begun to advocate "voluntary" reductions of working hours by agreement between employers and employees. This involves swapping leisure for wages and maintaining profits for capital rather than preserving hourly rates of pay for existing employees. Saving would allow the hiring of extra workers.

More radical commentators and trade unionists advocate shorter working hours without loss of pay. Most

recognise this proposal involves a necessary struggle against and transfer of profit from capital.

Those considering the problem in depth generally conclude that reduced working hours will never be sufficient to generate enough jobs to replace those displaced by technology. Instead, society must begin to value activities traditionally unpaid e.g. study, caring for others, and voluntary work.

Reducing working hours would be part of the solution, allowing people to devote more time to such activities. So too would payment for these activities. Elements within the recent French unemployed movement have begun to come to the conclusion that the real solution lies in a guaranteed minimum income.

This proposal has **several variants**. Some simply advocate payment of a **minimum** allowance to each citizen. Others propose negative income tax whereby payments are higher the further a person's income falls below a threshold level, and above which tax would have to be paid on income. This has been recommended as a means of reducing administrative costs of systems under which recipients of benefits must fit into particular categories (i.e. student, single parent, unemployed) and satisfy other administrative criteria. Even those who see dangers of "bludging" in proposals for a guaranteed minimum income concede its costs could be compensated for by reduced administrative costs.

Others insist recipients of benefits undertake "reciprocal obligations" like work for the dole training. Given the continuing destruction of jobs by technological advances, such suggestions do not reflect reality to the same extent as proposals for a guaranteed minimum income.

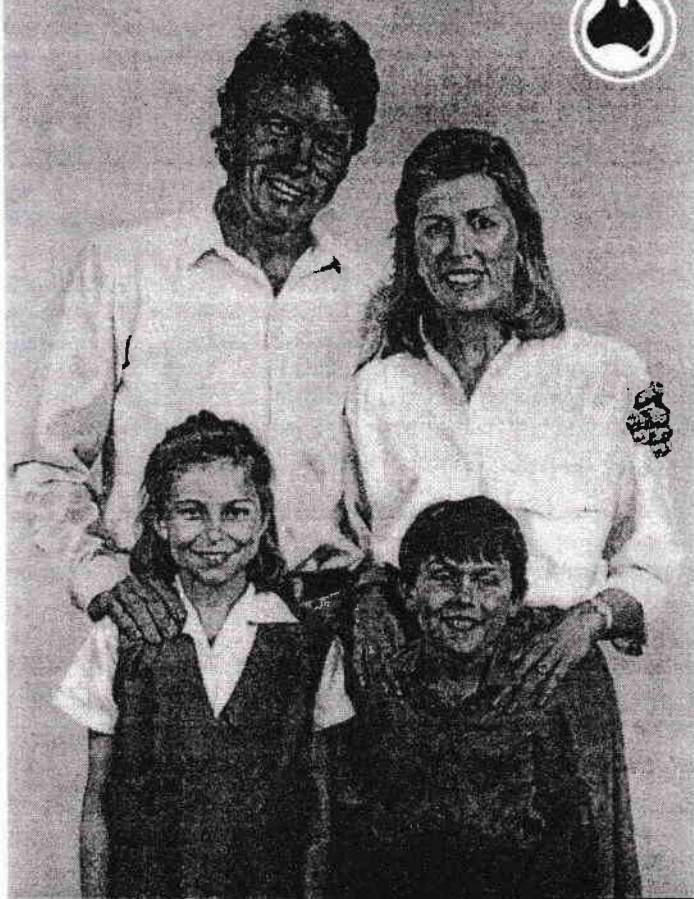
This proposal offers the prospect of providing a guaranteed minimum income for all out of the production generated by the common technological heritage of humankind as well as recognising the social value of a diverse range of useful activities.

Rolf Sorensen

Automation in  
the banking  
industry,  
Sydney, 1982



# NATIONALS



Picture  
accompanying  
National Party  
"We Believe"  
statement

# abolish the white race

The words to the union song 'Solidarity Forever' are sung to the tune of the anti slavery song John Brown's Body. In 1859 John Brown launched an assault on the town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia to seize the US arsenal and establish a colony for escaped slaves. He was captured and later hung for treason.

In the tradition of John Brown and the 19th century American anti slavery activists, the editors of the journal *Race Traitor* call for "outrageous acts of provocation" in order to disrupt the solidarity of the so-called white race. The existence of the white race, they argue, depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender, or any other interest they hold. Yet the solidarity of the so-called white race is often based on fear and complacency rather than on a conscious or deeply felt commitment to white supremacy.

It has long been known that the white race is *not* a natural category. Social and natural scientists have shown it has no scientific legitimacy. Racial divisions and indeed the idea of race itself, are historical and social constructions. Race is the product of power and discrimination.

However race cannot be wished away or overlooked because the privileges and disadvantages justified by race are real. Neither does the claim that race is socially constructed invalidate the claims of those who speak, for example, as Asian or Aboriginal, as some liberal-minded academics have argued.

The task for so called white revolutionaries, according to *Race Traitor* is to struggle to abolish the white race from within and to challenge and disrupt the institutions that reproduce race and racism. Anti racism is not enough.

## Anti-Fascism, "Anti-Racism," and Abolition

There now exist in this country and around the world a number of organizing projects, research centres, and publications that call themselves "anti-racist." Almost all the attention of the "anti-racist" movement is focussed on groups like the Nazis and the Klan that explicitly avow their racism, and on various movements like anti-abortion and anti-gay rights that are largely led by people on the far right of the political spectrum, and its programmatic initiatives are directed almost exclusively at combating these forces.

We think this is a mistake. Just as the capitalist system is not a capitalist plot, *race is not the work of racists*. On the contrary, it is reproduced by the principal institutions of society, among which are the schools (which define "excellence"), the labor market (which defines "employment"), the law (which defined "crime"), the welfare system (which defines "poverty"), and the family (which defines "kinship")—and *it is reinforced by various reform programs which address many of the social problems traditionally of concern to the "left."*

Racist and far-right groups in the main represent caricatures of reality in this race-defined society; at most they are efforts by a few to push the race line farther than what is currently considered proper. If that is the case, the "anti-racist" movement is seriously misreading the roots of the race problem, and pursuing an erroneous strategy for addressing it.

*Race Traitor* believes that the main target of those who seek to eradicate the color line should be the institutions and behaviors that maintain it: the schools, the criminal justice and welfare systems, the employers and unions, and the family ...



We recently saw a report on an attempt by a group of self-proclaimed Nazis to hold a "Gay-bashing" fest in New Hope, Pennsylvania. According to the report, what happened is this: on learning that the Nazis planned to march and rally, a group of their opponents called a counter-rally. The Nazis, fearful for their safety, called off their march, but proceeded with the rally, which took place as scheduled behind a wall of police, who protected the Nazis from the hostile crowd. The report states, "Residents of New Hope and anti-fascist organizers alike claimed the cancellation of the march as a victory for anti-fascist organizers. By creating the possibility of hundreds or thousands of counter-protesters willing to physically confront the Nazis we made it impossible for them to march. This strategy, of organizing for the possibility of physical confrontation, and bringing hundreds of people willing to carry it out, is clearly a successful one and needs to be pursued in the future."

We are not so sure. That the cancellation of the march was a defeat for the Nazis we have no doubt; but it seems to us that it was more of a victory for the state than for the anti-fascist organizers, because the state was able to emerge as the defenders of both free speech and law and order, marginalizing the "extremists" on both sides—those who want to build death camps and those who want to prevent their construction. We are inclined

to agree with another commentator who called the counter-demonstration "ineffective."

If counter-demonstrating is a "strategy," then what is its aim? If it is to do material damage to the fascists, then it takes no genius to point out that such damage can be done them more effectively on virtually any day of the year other than when they appear in public surrounded by a wall of cops and television cameras. If it is to win people out of the Nazi ranks, we have no way of knowing how effective such actions are. If the aim is to expose the state as the defender of Nazis, that is only a very partial truth; the state is the defender of public order, and has shown itself quite willing to repress Nazis and other white supremacist groups who threaten that order. And if the purpose is to win people to a vision of a world without race barriers, then we must say that any action which aims to crush the nazis physically and fails to do so because of state intervention has the effect of reinforcing the authority of the state, which, as we said, is the most important agency maintaining race barriers.

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<http://www.postfun.com/racetrailor/>

## Mumia Abu-Jamal

As *Rank and File News* goes to press the fate of Mumia Abu-Jamal is not yet known. By the time you read these words he may have been put to death by the State of Pennsylvania

On 30 October 1998 The Supreme Court of the State of Pennsylvania denied Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal for a new trial. Mumia's legal team is expected to appeal the Pennsylvania decision to the Federal level. He was convicted of first degree murder and given the death penalty for the alleged shooting and killing of a white police officer on December 9, 1981. He had no prior criminal record.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was a founding member of the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia, and a journalist who reported on police misconduct, abuse of authority, and racial discrimination, education and housing. He has continued to write whilst in prison.

For the moment, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's decision bumps the life-or-death decision back into the lap of Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Ridge. Based upon his past actions in similar situations, Governor Ridge may be expected to sign Mumia's death warrant at any time.

Website: [www.mumia.org](http://www.mumia.org)

## a statement from death row



Once again, Pennsylvania's highest court has shown us the best justice that FOP [Fraternal Order of Police] money can buy. Ignoring right reason, their own precedent, and fundamental justice, they have returned to the stranglehold of death. In their echoes

of the tortured logic of Judge Albert Sabo, they have reflected a striking fidelity to the DA's office. If it is fair to have a tribunal who are in part admittedly paid by the FOP—and at least one justice who can double as DA one day and a judge the next in the same case—then fairness is just as empty a word as "justice." To paraphrase Judge Sabo, it is "just an emotional feeling."

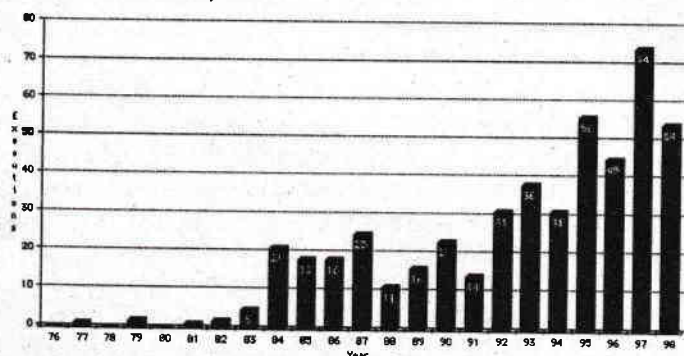
In recent months the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has upheld death sentences in cases where an impartial reading of transcripts or pleadings would make an honest affirmation all but impossible. They have ignored all evidence of innocence, overlooked clear instances of jury taint, and cast a dead eye on defense attorneys' ineffectiveness. What they have done in my case is par for the course. This is a political decision, paid for by the FOP on the eve of the election. It is a Mischief Night gift from a court that has a talent for the macabre.

I am sorry that this court did not rule on the right side of history. But I am not surprised. Every time our nation has come to a fork in the road with regard to race, it has chosen to take the path of compromise and betrayal. On October 29th, 1998, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court committed a collective crime: it damned due process, strangled the fair trial, and raped justice.

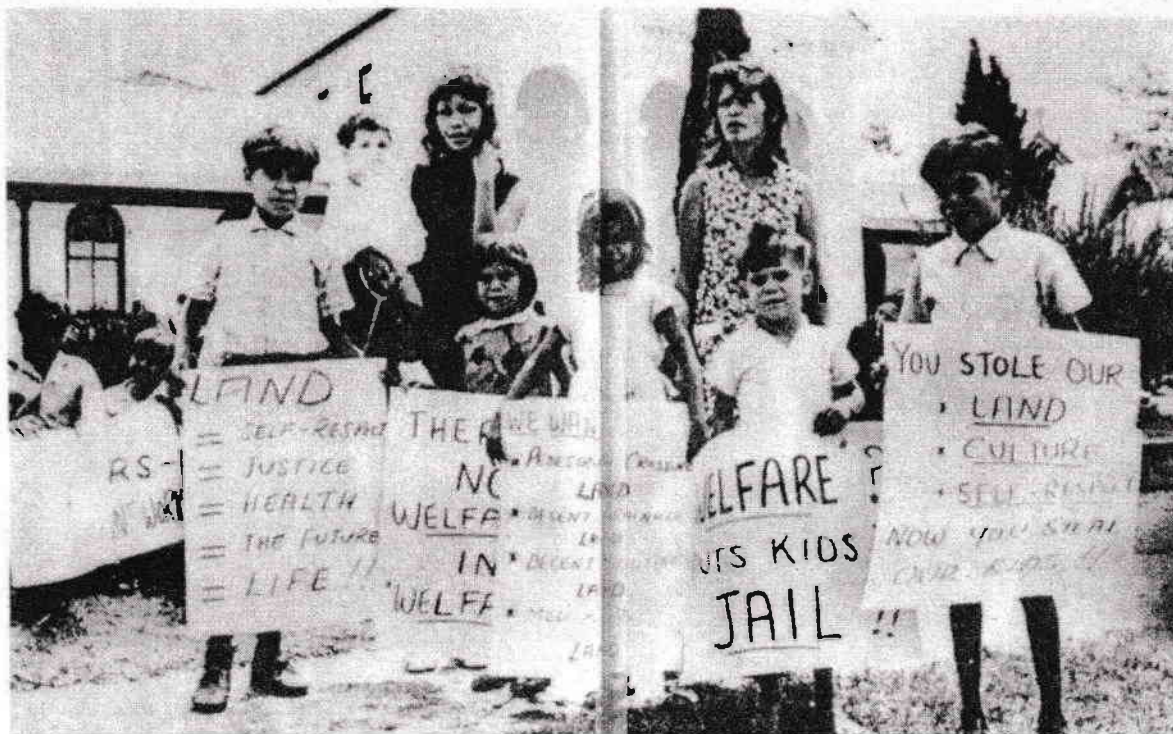
Even after this legal legerdemain [sleight of hand] I remain innocent. A court cannot make an innocent man guilty. Any ruling founded on injustice is not justice. The righteous fight for life, liberty, and for justice can only continue.

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Executions in the USA by Year







Shirley Morris and her children demonstrate outside Taree Court House, 1972

# the power of whiteness

In 1972 at the peak of Aboriginal political militancy in Australia, two Italian brothers, Alessandro and Fabio Cavadini, made a film called *Ningla-Ana* (Aranda for Hungry for Land) about the Aboriginal Embassy demonstrations that year. In a scene filmed at the Australian National University, a group of white, middle-class feminists hold a session of mutual non-comprehension with a group of radical activist women from the Koori movement. It is an interesting scene as the black women aggressively try to explain to the white feminists that racism is what they perceive as the problem, and the white women earnestly attempt to ask the black women if it isn't men that are the real problem. Any suggestions by the black sisters that these white feminists might be speaking from a position of privilege and power merely because of their whiteness or, that having been infused with a lifetime of white racist conditioning, these white women were incapable of understanding a black women's perspective, were met with a combination of surprise, shock and hurt on the part of the white feminists.

The communication problem between Koori political activists and non-Koori supporters, eloquently revealed in that scene filmed in 1972, is one which persists to this day.

One example of this today is the dramatic difference in the treatment of the issues of racism and sexism on the University of Melbourne campus. When one enrolls as a student at the university, your student diary has more than a dozen pages of information about sexual harassment, discrimination and other issues related to sexism, but not a single page is devoted to issues of racism on campus. This is extraordinary given that Melbourne University has one of Australia's largest overseas student populations and that Koori students in recent years have been outspoken about racism on campus.

The problem at the University of Melbourne is not unique and I can see little evidence of progressive Australian feminists and/or

anti-racists trying to come to terms with where their own whiteness places them in any discourse with Koori Australians. This is despite the fact that feminists, in particular, have been at the forefront of developing theories that have changed society for the better since the 1960s.

Ruth Frankenberg in her book, *White Women, Race Matters* states that, "since the consciousness-raising groups of the late 1960s, feminists have transformed accounts of personal experience into politicised and theorised terrain". She goes on to point out that during the second wave of feminism, there was a challenge to the two major canons of the progressive left, the first being male domination of left and anti-racist movements, and secondly, when non-white feminists questioned feminism dominated by white-centred accounts of female experience.

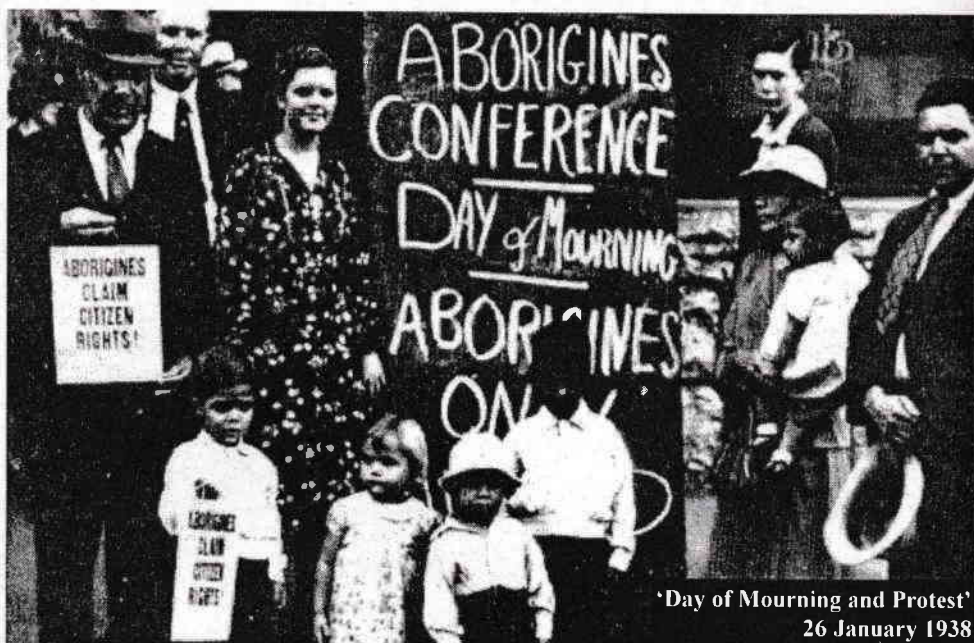
In Australia, Koori political activists have challenged white hegemony over our political movement as far back as the early 1930s when such people as Bill Fergusson, Pearl Gibbs, William Cooper, Marge Tucker and Jack Patton created the earliest Koori-controlled political organisations. The basic arguments in favour of Koori-controlled organisations to represent Koori people have resonated down the decades in Australia. The inability of even our friends and supporters to shake off their own, deeply imbued racist notions of Aborigines meant that Kooris had to create their own voices to be heard.

Almost forty years later, in the mid-1960s, another generation of Koori political activists were confronted with the same problem; that some of the worst enemies of Aboriginal self-determination were those who professed to be our best friends. Ironically, in the 1960s the only national Aboriginal organisation was the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), which was dominated and controlled by non-Aboriginal people. After FCAATSI co-ordinated the successful 1967 Referendum campaign, some of the Aboriginal members,



including Bruce McGuinness, poet Kath Walker (later Oojeroo Noonuckle) and her son Denis, began to suggest it was inappropriate for FCAATSI to remain under white control. This proposition was met with fear, anguish and derision by most white members of FCAATSI who promptly labelled those advocating change as Black Power Radicals, thereby marginalising and isolating Walker and her group, and clearly reminding them of their otherness to the good Christian folk and soft-left trade union officials who dominated FCAATSI.

Amidst much muttering about ungrateful blacks and Communist influenced radicals, the whites in FCAATSI fiercely fought to protect their positions, which to them meant the prestige of an image as a humanitarian,



***“The inability of even our friends and supporters to shake off their own, deeply imbued racist notions of Aborigines meant that Kooris had to create their own voices to be heard.”***

whereas to the Kooris it meant a voice in the ongoing battle for survival. The white resistance to change was so strong that McGuinness, Walker, Nicholls and their supporters were ultimately forced to split from FCAATSI and create the first national Aboriginal-controlled political organisation, the National Tribal Council. This all came about because the strongest supporters and best friends of Aboriginal people in 1968 still did not think Aboriginal people were capable of running their own affairs. These white do-gooders seemed incapable of any insight into their own racism but, ironically, they were still the white people best disposed toward Aboriginal people in that era.

This is one of the significant contradictions that continues to bedevil black white relations in Australia, and it stems from a singular lack of insight by most white Australians regarding their

romanticising and idealizing of the Aboriginal peoples and their heroic struggle for justice, which in turn makes them blind to the blatant contradictions that organisations like ATSIC and concepts like native title, confront them with. This leads to otherwise sensible and sincere people saying we must defend native title, despite the fact that the Native Title Act is regarded by Aboriginal leaders like Jacqui Katona and Murandoo Yanner as being a great sell-out of Black Australia. It also leads the same white supporters to illogically believe that the government agency ATSIC is a credible, Koori controlled organisation, rather than the primary instrument of white control over Kooris in this country. *A comprehensive ignorance about the people, culture, political history and landscape of Koori Australia is something that progressive political groups too often share with the rest of white Australia.*

***“This leads to otherwise sensible and sincere people saying we must defend native title, despite the fact that the Native Title Act is regarded by Aboriginal leaders like Jacqui Katona and Murandoo Yanner as being a great sell-out of Black Australia.”***

own condition and privilege in both colonial and a supposedly post-colonial Australia.

These attitudes have resonated down through one hundred years of reproduction and refinement through education systems, media and culture to linger and lurk in the minds and culture of present day white Australia and find expression in the likes of Pauline Hanson and some of her followers. The sad thing is that many people who sit at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Pauline Hanson also display signs of inherited, infused bigotry. I have already described how this manifests itself in the current disparity between attempts to combat sexism and racism at the University of Melbourne, but it also functions in many other ways as well.

For example, virtually all anti-racists still regard Indigenous people in an essentialist way. This results in an unwitting

This inability to come to terms with anything but their own inverted, culturally manufactured and historically inaccurate perception of who and what we are, or even that we are real people, remains a significant part of the problem of non-comprehension on the part of white Australia. Frankenberg argues that, whiteness, as a set of normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitively excludes and those to whom it does violence. It is not Kooris who need to know and understand white Australia, it is them who need to understand us. Indigenous people in Australia have had white language, culture, religion and history rammed down their throats for two hundred years. And in all that time, with all their science and technology, what has white Australian culture come to know of the Indigenous people?

Australians today find it hard to accept that most of what was taught to their grandparents' generation about Indigenous people



were distortions and falsehoods based on Nazi-style racial theories, and that these myths and lies continue to infuse and pollute the space from which they today speak.

To begin to understand how white ignorance impacts on the complex world of Government Aboriginal Affairs policies since the 1970s, we must first recall that it was the Aboriginal political militancy of the 1960s and 70s that forced the major changes implemented by Whitlam in 1973. The legendary Aboriginal Embassy demonstrations of 1972, saw Aboriginal activists place their struggle in the international political arena when the TV cameras of the world were attracted by the brilliant audacity of the protest. The success of the Embassy resulted in changes which saw the Whitlam Government forced to recognise that the appalling health, housing, education and incarceration rates of Aborigines needed urgent attention.

To implement these new policies Whitlam boosted federal Aboriginal Affairs funding from \$44 million in 1973, to almost \$200 million by 1975. Initially some of these funds were allocated to assist Koori community self-help programs such as health centres, housing co-operatives, legal services and child-care centres, but very quickly things began to change as a new elite of Koori public servants began to emerge and become the embryo of a black middle class.

Back in 1973 there were only three Aboriginal federal public servants, Charles Perkins, Margaret Lawrie and Reg Saunders. Twenty years later in 1994 the number of Kooris employed by ATSIC was 582, although this still represented only 38% of the total staff.

a fraud for years and the term Aboriginal industry was in fact coined 20 years ago to describe the vast gravy train that employed large numbers of non-Koori people during the Hawke/Keating years. Illogically, these days it is deemed racist or politically incorrect to point out that many of Pauline Hanson's criticisms of ATSIC are valid, thus ensuring that little reform will occur in the Aboriginal industry, thereby guaranteeing that another generation of Koori Australians will suffer the appalling inequities in health, education, incarceration rates, premature death, etc to which their parents and grandparents generations were subjected.

So, in conclusion, I again quote Frankenberg, who said, "Analysing the construction of whiteness is important as a means of reconceptualising the grounds on which white activists participate in anti-racist work." It is therefore vital that any person who does seek a more meaningful path should read Frankenberg's book. They should also consider some of the contradictions about Australian society and its commitment to Indigenous Australia in the context of what she has to say about whiteness. The policy mistakes of successive governments, and even the parameters of the race debate, are examples of limitations placed on Indigenous people by white Australians who refuse to acknowledge the significance of their own position of whiteness in the current discourse of race in this country.

Gary Foley

Reprinted and slightly edited from *Farrago*, newspaper of Melbourne University Student Union.

***"A comprehensive ignorance about the people, culture, political history and landscape of Koori Australia is something that progressive political groups too often share with the rest of white Australia."***

Over the previous 20 years the public service (through lucrative salary and perks packages) had recruited Kooris by the hundreds, mostly employed in junior positions without real power (in 1994 in ATSIC 91% of Koori staff were employed below Senior Officer Level). Today, many of the potentially brightest minds from Indigenous Australia are safely contained in meaningless bureaucrat positions, subject to the Public Service Act and thereby constrained from doing anything useful for their communities. Simultaneously, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of white professionals who have found lucrative careers in Aboriginal Affairs.

The funding emphasis over the years swiftly evolved from community self-help programs, to bureaucrat generated, white-expert-intensive, mega-projects. These programmes consume vast amounts of Aboriginal monies and create extensive white employment but little for Kooris genuinely in need. In 1998 Federal Government expenditure on Aboriginal Affairs approaches \$3 billion, yet all of the social indicators clearly show that the majority of Indigenous Australians are as bad off today as they were thirty years ago. In which case, I hear you ask, what has happened to the more than \$20 billion spent on Aboriginal Affairs since 1973? In a perverse demonstration of a post-colonial moment in Australia, most of that money has ended up in the pockets and pay packets of non-Aboriginal Australians.

But in Australia today, where the simplistic one notion of Pauline Hanson would have you believe that all this money went to Kooris, there persists an equally simplistic notion among the opponents of Pauline that she is wrong and racist to criticise ATSIC. Numerous Aboriginal political activists have slammed ATSIC as





# rural crisis

The crisis in rural Australia is easy to see for those prepared to look. Over 35% of family farms have been sold and the families who owned and ran them have disappeared from their communities. The average age of Australian farmers is 60 plus, the drift of rural youth to the cities continues unabated, the loss of community facilities and infrastructure has reached crisis proportions. The level of indebtedness remains a threat to the very existence of all but the major players, mainly banks, agribusinesses and the extremely wealthy.

The loss of markets, especially since the meltdown of the Asian economies and the seeming continuous reduction in product prices, adds to the pauperisation of rural families. It is hardly surprising in this context that 9% and more of bush voters turned to the One Nation Party. Just as many city workers are bitterly disappointed at the leadership of the ACTU and many unions along with the ALP, so too do rural electors face treachery and betrayal from their traditional representatives. The National Party has become the spokesperson for mining and huge agribusiness and have supported the development of so called "rural adjustment schemes" which are designed to remove small/family farmers from the industry and to facilitate the eating up of farmland by giant corporations. The National Farmers Federation is

Workers at the  
salt stacks,  
Cheetham Salt  
Works



in the same boat, representing the interests of large graziers, miners and agribusiness. Monsanto one of the largest agribusinesses in the world, is confident that by the year 2000 they will own or control 96% of agricultural fertiliser and seed sale business throughout the world.

The never ending drive to increase production has led to farming practices that could be described as rape of the environment. Droughts and floods within an El Nino/Nina cycle have reduced primary production and return on investment to a lottery and the cries for help and understanding have fallen on deaf ears because those in power believe that the pain and adjustment is necessary if Australian agriculture is to continue to compete in the world market.

Small farmers are being taken back into history. They are being reduced to landless peasants, tenants of the banks or permanently beholden to the agribusiness that controls their particular industry. Vertical integration is the name. Domination of the market place is the game, as firms such as McDonald's define what will be produced for them at what price and other retailers and manufacturers stitch up contracts that leave farmers totally dependent on the whim of their "benefactors."

Bill Deller

## myths about world hunger

Abundance, not scarcity, best describes the world's food supply. The world produces enough grain and many other commonly eaten foods to provide at least 4.3 pounds of food per person a day, according to a recent report *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* by California-based Institute for Food and Development Policy.

Even as countries have excess food, people still go hungry. In 1997, for example, the American Association for the Advancement of Science found that, in the developing world, 78 percent of all malnourished children aged under five live in countries with food surpluses. The problem is that many people are too poor to buy readily available food.

That nature is to blame for famine is another popular hunger myth that blurs the real causes of starvation. "It's too easy to blame nature; food is always available for those who can afford it while starvation during hard times hits only the poorest," the report says.

"Millions live on the brink of disaster in south Asia, Africa and elsewhere, because they are deprived of land by a powerful few, trapped in the unrelenting grip of

debt, or miserably paid."

Natural events rarely explain deaths, they are simply the final push over this brink. Population growth is another mythical cause of hunger, says the report.

Large landowners who control most of the best land often leave much of it idle, says *Twelve Myths*. "By contrast, small farmers typically achieve at least four to five times greater output per acre, in part because they work their land more intensively and use integrated, and often more sustainable, production systems," it says.

Redistribution of land would give millions of small farmers in developing countries the incentive to invest in land improvements, to rotate crops and leave land fallow for the sake of long-term soil fertility, according to the report.

Because the market responds to money not actual need, it can only work to eliminate hunger when purchasing power is widely dispersed, says the report. As the rural poor are increasingly pushed from land, they are less and less able to make their demands for food register in the market.



# spirit of total resistance

In the Spirit of Total Resistance is a DIY compilation CD featuring mostly local Melbourne bands. It's a benefit for political prisoner Leonard Peltier who was wrongly and unfairly imprisoned after a shootout between the Native American Indian Movement and the FBI in which two FBI agents and one Indian were killed. Peltier's trial was based on prejudice and he was used as a scapegoat even though there is strong evidence proving his innocence. He is still in prison and has been since 1977. The CD comes with a free booklet that contains addresses and contacts for further information on Peltier and other political prisoners both in Australia and overseas.

The CD itself is anarchist oriented with plenty of underground anarcho punk, folk and indie music that too many people are unlikely to know exists or dare venture out to find. This is not corporate friendly radio polished sound crud. If you are open minded and accepting of new things you may like this. It's a matter of taste really.

From in ya face brooding punk like Bastard Squad, Walsh St Cop Killers and Copyright, to sweet indie

Ninety Nine or fierce grindcore Stand Against, to mandolin playing folk punk Mutiny. There's even a bit of new wave by the 2yr Olds and H-Block 101 make an appearance. There is something here for everyone. Support your local music scene and support political prisoners because they're just like you but they got caught. Cheers.

Suzie

In The Spirit of Total Resistance is available at:

Barricade Books/Info Shop  
PO Box 199  
Brunswick East Vic 3057

Spiral Objective  
PO Box 126  
Oaklands Park SA 5046



AIM members  
under arrest  
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