

# *Rank and File News*



HERCIN  
TABILUKA  
UNIONS  
RACISM  
FORESTS

## RECLAIM MAY DAY

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[rfn.collective@mailcity.com](mailto:rfn.collective@mailcity.com)

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**Rank and File News**  
PO Box 103  
West Brunswick  
Vic 3055  
Australia

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Yvonne Magarula is the senior traditional owner of the Jabiluka land. She is shown here at Madjar-Djawumba, an area of the Jabiluka lease which holds sacred sites that must not be disturbed. JAG story on page 12

## 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.



# Stacey Blackburn

27 March 1982 - 24 December 1998



*Written in dimming light  
Sitting on a park bench.  
In an oversized nature strip  
On one side factories and houses resting next to each other.  
On the other side huge silos.  
Power lines pinching through the park  
Sunset.  
Sometimes beauty lies where we least expect it.*  
(1997)

Stacey was a central point in the lives of several of the people who have been involved in the Rank and File News project over the years. In issue 32 she was interviewed as the youngest person to take part in the RMIT occupation protesting against upfront tertiary fees.

After many false I have realised that the best way to tell the reader something about Stacey is to let her do the talking. She writes with a clear and vital style that bounces off the page and she writes with an enviable directness. The following pieces were produced at different times in her life for different purposes. Some are written in urgent handwriting in her notebook just as they came to her and some are more considered pieces written for school.

Stacey was a private person who disliked being discussed by the adults in her life. I have tried to respect that privacy and at the same time show the range and depth of emotions she experienced, her unusual insight and ability to ask herself difficult questions.

Stacey's early years contained the seeds which would later flower in the young woman she became. She sat on her mother Fiona's lap as Fiona wrote her essays for university and later, when Fiona moved in with her sister Meredith, she was entranced by her aunt's whirling dramatic fellow dance students. She grew up with a talent for writing, acting and music.

Stacey began school at Northcote Primary in 1986. Photographs taken of her during this period of her life show a self-possessed little girl with a ready smile and a confident pose for the camera.

Stacey became seriously ill and missed about five months of

grade 5. When she returned to school she found that friendship allegiances had changed and this may have contributed to her lifelong uncertainty about her place in the world. Stacey was very self-effacing at this time and echoes of this could be discerned years later when Stacey worried about whether it would be all right to telephone close friends.

*I look at the crumpled photo in my hand, a frozen moment in time. Everyone looks younger, happier and sillier. It's just a snapshot, unbalanced and badly lit. It looks like there's an invisible monster or being in the middle of the photo because everyone is in a mid air dive away to the side, camera shy. Some are clutching pillows, pulling them up to their red, frantic faces. The laughter and shrill squealing wafts out of the photo. I wish I could immerse myself in the photo, just sink into that day, melt into it and never re form. I run my finger over the shiny figures, we all thought we were so 'mature'. We felt ourselves waiting to step into the new world of high school, out of the 'childish, stupid' primary school environment. Underneath the hot pink tops and leggings we were secretly wearing bras and crop tops. Despite our yearning to be 'grown up' we still were relatively care-free. I can see the bright light of young happiness behind our eyes. The smooth skin, tender lips and soft hair. It was taken at my house, my birthday party. My closest friends were staying over, we had videos, food and endless amounts of energy. I'm partially in the photo, a blue sock, an unshaven ankle and a flanelette leg.*  
(1997)

Stacey attended Northcote High School and then after much thought she made the difficult decision to move to Princes Hill Secondary College in 1997.

*Last night or should I say this morning I had some very weird dreams...*

*I ... remember feeling all pressured to stay at NHS because I would hurt [my friends] feelings if I decided to leave again, but I knew that I didn't want to be at Northcote at all. I wanted to be at the PHSC, but I felt I couldn't."*  
(undated)

*Its edzactley the middle of the holidays. Halfway through year ten, halfway to VCE... At the moment I am sitting in Bakers. Today I saw C., we went to The Hideout (Marios was packed). These holidays I have seen a lot of Northcote people, its been good.*  
(1997)

Stacey was taken to many demonstrations and rallies as young child but chose to stay away in early adolescence. She discovered and worked out her own issues. She was passionate about racism, she went to Jabiluka Action demos, participated in the occupation of RMIT protesting the introduction of upfront tertiary fees and attended anti-one nation demonstrations when ever she could.

In her final year at Northcote, Stacey and another young woman acted as spokespeople for a group of students who went on strike in support of a boy who had been suspended for shaving his head. The headmaster attempted to discount Stacey's argument because

she wore a ring in her nose but the boy was reinstated anyway.

She elected to study 20<sup>th</sup> century history at Princes Hill because wanted to find out more about the Holocaust. Her initial disbelief turned to anger. She was deeply affected by a radio play about the impossible choices faced by the leader of a Jewish ghetto under Nazi rule.

*Travelling to the Holocaust Museum I was rather nervous, nervously apprehensive, interested but cautiously dreading it. Finally we arrived at a plain, smallish building only to be told we were early, slight anticlimax...*

*I listened with growing foreboding to the information about the happenings, dates, places and events leading up to, during and after W.W.II. I gratefully noticed that all of us, the whole of year eleven was silent...*

*Then I listened to another survivor's story, holding my breath when he told us he was a twin. After his talk another perspective was shown, the experience of a Jewish woman who had to pretend she was not Jewish.*

*I couldn't help marvelling at these ordinary looking, older people who were telling us that they were there, experienced it and had actually come through. They were with people I've seen in photos and whose suffering I'd learned about.*

*Next, we were allowed to look around the displays. I was shocked, disgusted, extremely saddened, angered and nearly came to tears while looking at the photos, reading the plaques and taking it in.*

*How could this have happened? How can we do such horrible things to each other? How can we be filled with such hatred?*

*Honestly, I was shell-shocked as I walked out. I had learnt so much, but I felt sick. I had gained a lot from these strong people, but I could only stammer.*

(1998)

By the time Stacey was three Fiona was finding single motherhood difficult. She and several other people came together so that they could share the responsibility of caring for two children - Stacey and Tiernan. The bonds formed at this time were lasting; Stacey and Tiernan called each other sister and brother and Stacey maintained close links with her co-parents throughout her life.

At first the transition from having an intimate, almost exclusive, relationship with her mother to a broader set of relationships was difficult for Stacey. She developed an unusual ability for creative introspection

*My life is like a canyon. It's seems that everything is going fine and then there's a deep, steep and unexpected dive down, down, down into despair and there seems no way out and then you find the other side of the gorge and there's a long, hard climb up or simply it slowly levels out and you don't realise that your out until you are standing back on level ground and you are happy again, but before long you come to yet another canyon to fall into and climb out of and learn something new.*

*There is a saying "You learn from your mistakes". I agree wholeheartedly with this saying. Because after emerging from a new canyon you are wiser than before. But it is a very hard way to learn a lesson. Sometimes we see other people fall into a canyon in front of you and that helps you avoid it and learn from their mistake.*

*Sometimes I want to be a bird so that I can fly away, away from my problems that seem to be constantly holding me back and gnawing my mind and stabbing my heart. How many times have I gone over my past and pondered my future. I look back on the confusion and fear that would race through my mind. The*



*conflicting feelings and the contradictory words that would throw me into deeper conflict. Why must I go over these hurtful memories and painful feelings. Sometimes I think that it is because I must sort things out, but nothing ever sorts out. Why must I re-live and re-live over and over again these memories. I do not know.*

*But I do know. It is because I must sort it out. I cannot lead a normal life with these haunting feelings. I think I have come to cope with it, but then I cry when I think about. Maybe this is normal and I cannot expect to be fine with the click of my fingers. Then I think what's the big deal. Why am I making such a fuss about it. I just wish I was a bird and could fly away and not have to think about it ever again.*

(1994)

*Looking into oneself is scary. Looking at others is easy. Self examination is iffy. Too quickly it turns into self punishment and ends up destroying one's soul. Tread carefully along the path of self-criticism and supposed bettering of oneself.*

(undated)

*My edges are curling, recoiling from  
From whats unchangeable*

(undated)

*Is This My Life*

*I look onto a barren stretch of land  
Is this my life?*

*A few spikes of spinefex dot the horizon*

*They are vegetation*

*But they are small, spiky and dry*

*Not very invigorating*

*They are drought resistant*

*Do I resist things?*

*Is this my life?*

*The surface below my feet is sand*

*Dry and blowing in my face*

*Does everything blow in by face?*

*Does everything agitate me?*

*The tiny dry grains of sand get caught in my eyes*

*Is this my life?*

*Why do I ponder?*

*Do I really need to know?*

*Does anyone really know?*

*Is there a right answer?*



*Is there more than one answer?  
Is there an answer?  
Why do I have to know?  
I'm curious  
Too curious?  
Maybe, maybe not  
(undated)*

Stacey started travelling early in life. During their first year at primary school, Stacey and Tiernan travelled around Australia for five months and she visited Meredith in England at the end of her first semester at Northcote High School.

Maybe it soothed her sense of aloneness to be on the move, just passing through, leaving and arriving.

*I spoke to Tiernan last night, he was calling from Paris. He was leaving, he'd been there alone. I am so jealous that he can enjoy that freedom, especially in Paris!  
It's coming closer to his homecoming. I mean he'll be back in still a few months away, but it's past the halfway mark. I actually quite miss him, but I'm curious to see his and mine change over the past year.  
(1998)*

*I loath flying. I love travelling, but I don't like airports. Of course I like them because they are the connection between leaving and arriving. But the actual places make me lost and claustrophobic. Everyone walks around like they know edzactly where, when, why and with whom they're going, and I stand in the middle with no fucking idea.  
(1998)*

Stacey loved life and had a great respect for it. She found her own very hard at times but she never seemed to lose sight of the preciousness of it.

*Life does not change alone  
We change it.  
We prune it.  
We water it.  
And we watch its growth with admiration and eagerness.  
Life is like a flower  
Its planted  
It sprouts  
It grows  
It blooms  
Then it wilts  
Shrivels and returns its nutrients to the ground like all the flowers before it.  
Where a new flower is starting the cycle again.  
(undated)*

This is part of an essay she wrote for school in response to the euthanasia debate:

*Firstly I believe everyone has the right to dictate their lives. I also believe that if someone wishes to take their own life then technically they have every right to do so. That is not to say I condone suicide... I do believe in living life to the fullest...  
When one gives up hope and honestly no longer enjoys anything about living, maybe that's reason enough to decide to end it all. But is it good to yearn for death so? Is it right to disregard life and its many wonders?...  
I must say I do marvel at Dr Philip Nitschke's strength,*

*determination and firmness of conviction. He seems so self-assured and confident that he is right. How can he know for sure?... I think its best to leave it up to the individual. I mean no-one really knows you, except you. No-one really knows what you are feeling or what you want except you...  
I think that we can become too judgmental ... no-one putting their two cents in has ever been in such a position. Neither has Dr Nitschke for that matter.  
(1998)*

When I think about Stacey I am struck by the double-edgedness of her life. She loved travelling but travel took her away from the people she loved. The sensitivity that allowed her to write so passionately about the bright sea-shore and care so much about others also sharpened the pain of her dark periods of despair. Her upbringing enabled her to appreciate difference but she also had a strong desire to fit-in. She was surrounded by love and sometimes felt very alone.

*I am fighting the urge so hard. I can't control whatever is inside that is pushing me towards it. I can't stop crying.  
Shut-up  
(undated)*

I think of a young woman courageously dealing with her life, working hard to fulfil her potential and making plans for the future. Her life is celebrated and her death mourned.

*I just went for a swim. I've been swimming every day. Its divine! The water is so warm. The waves are huge (probably not really, but according to my standards they are). Its a two minute walk to the beach from our unit. The beach is practically deserted. Everything that surrounds me is beautiful. The sand is clean and smooth. The water is stunning (as you'd guess) with hardly any seaweed. Forest surrounds. So I walk through furnery, over a beautiful creek, tall overhanging trees, roots, lichen covered logs, creepers and intertwining branches, my ears filled with the sounds of birds to the beach. I have to walk through a river which runs down to meet the sea, across the white sand to the sea... the river is full of big and little schools of fish. You should see the sky! You should see the horizon! There are crabs, sea snails (I actually watched 2 make their way across the wet sand, you know making those patterns you see, I watched them to that!) the our birds everywhere. Shore birds, river birds, seagulls of course, the birds in the forest. I watched some sort of bird of prey hunt. ... Anyway I've had my little nature/beauty/breathtaking crap rant. I feel complete.  
(undated)*

Richard Wahl





# Heroin, self help and left libertarianism

**W**hat occurs when one's experiences of life are so heavy that despair calls constantly? What transpires when that same life is reclaimed, re-moulded and re-shaped, expanded by crisis and by open-mindedness. Despair removed by longing, love and reciprocity.

A few years ago, I came to a way of knowing that resonated with defeat, defection and retreat—from the arrogance of the intellect and the self-righteousness of dogma, from the shackles of a crude Marxism and the politics of envy. Five years later and five years sicker, living in social and psychological dereliction, I surrendered, I threw in the towel, I got reasonable. I asked for and received help, not from the experts of life but from a group of "recovering" drug addicts and alcoholics.

I was awed by the spectacle of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) women, whom I knew to be feminists, sitting with tolerance whilst some men spoke in a sexist manner. I was in awe when I saw unionists, who were in warring factions within the building industry, introduce new "vulnerable" members to each other, overcoming their political differences to assist the newcomer. I was informed by an older AA member as I squirmed whilst an obviously religious member spoke, that even Christians had a right to sobriety and a respectful hearing. I was struck by the open-mindedness of participants as an AA member with many years of sobriety spoke of dialectical materialism and his atheism.

Through this engagement with AA, it was suggested that I attend Narcotics Anonymous (NA) to deal with my obvious drug problem, where, after a time, I became drug free.

This followed a decade long retreat from the left of the 1960s and 1970s as political activism gave way to a morass of self-defeating, drug-seeking behaviours. In seeking to understand and withdraw from these addictions my good friends and comrades appeared as bemused and ignorant as I was and explained my condition by the class antagonisms of this period, which oddly, did not appear to hinder them in creating social opportunities for themselves. In time, through various lost work and relationship break-ups, I was introduced to repeated (and failed) professional interventions, as I moved into social dereliction, homelessness, jails and institutions.

## Introduction

This work sets out to explore the phenomenon of drug-addiction and the present levels of drug use within Australian society and



Junk eat trash in a chemical kiss

attempts to create a dialogue within the "left" to begin to define a response to the demoralising spectacle of young people, particularly, but not exclusively, working class young people, being trapped within a chemical reality—whether it is through the use of legal drugs such as prescribed medications of the valium type, methadone and alcohol or through the use of illicit drugs such as cannabis, speed and heroin.

The extent of the use of these chemicals begs the question as to the social origin of this phenomenon and the appropriateness of public policy responses such as methadone and naltraxone that focus on the physiology of the user: signalling a "return" to the "medical model" and failings to offer social pathways, beyond the drug industry's "consumer" culture, for people trapped within this cycle.

The use of methadone and other pharmaceuticals ultimately involves a decision to define the problem of "addiction" as a medical problem and to focus on the most manageable and most easily understood phenomenon—the physiological needs of the drug user—as a technological fix with little reference to the social and personal problems that may underpin that use. (1) Further to this, the use of the police as change-agents working in partnership with drug and alcohol professionals within the present policy framework of harm reduction (2), begs the question as to the motivation of our policy makers and the role the state.

## The State and Public Policy

Harm Reduction as a health policy came to prominence in Australia with the coming of the HIV pandemic. With the realisation that the "gay disease" could spread into the general population through the activities of injecting drug users (IDU), needle exchanges and safe sex educational practises and means became available. This public health response, at the present time, sees Australia with the lowest HIV infection in the world. It may well not have been compassion for the gay community or IDU's that prompted this response, but fear amongst the "normal" community. The success of these strategies are undoubtedly very real, although the advent of the spreading Hepatitis C virus may undermine present strategies. The recent action by Health and Community Services to limit access to free condoms through needle exchange programs may also be very short sighted.

As an ex-user, an addict-in-recovery, I believe that the present harm reduction policies in relation to drug users are fundamentally based around social control. These current strategies undermine the "fact" that health or illness is an expression of the lived experience of society thus requiring social solutions beyond the traditional health domain. Before I return to this point, it is appropriate that the historical circumstances of the modern public health endeavour be explored.

According to Kreiger, public health policy has from its inception recognised that health is social and that disease has social causes. (3) Witness the origins of this modern endeavour during the rise of industrial capitalism and the influx of people into cities. With rising populations confined to crowded European cities, health problems became associated with the living and working conditions of the newly arrived, displaced country people who were seeking to survive as workers. The first public health strategies



focused on the state of the streets, housing and sewerage but recognised the need to regulate the space between the working class (and other non-desirable elements) and the bourgeoisie. According to Foucault, a “medico-administrative” regime developed to isolate and treat these problems of urban space and populations. (4)

The need to secure an ongoing labour supply created the need to establish hygienic practises which could eliminate chronic ill health—which, towards the end of the nineteenth century (in Britain), began to present a serious obstacle to economic and military expansion (5)—and hopefully promote a capacity for discipline and hard work. (6) The focus on hygiene rested on the assumption that disease was primarily a biological condition (the miasma), hence the need for sanitary reforms, refuse control and clean drinking water which left untouched the production system and its social relations which radicals like Frederick Engels identified as the primary cause of disease and morbidity. (7) The radical position that some disease could be overcome by specific changes to social organisation was undermined as the germ theory of disease took hold in the understanding and explanation of disease and illness. These scientific breakthroughs allowed germ theorists to portray the radical social perspective as “pre-scientific”, as environmental and social factors were no longer considered very relevant to the understanding or causation of disease. (8)

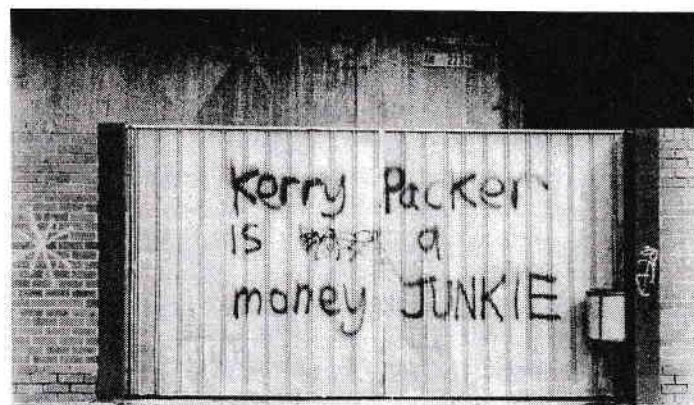
Issues of addiction in the 19th century tended to lie in the social world rather than in the area of medical intervention. In the working class setting of industrial cities, opium was predominantly bought by the working class as a palliative to the harshness of life. Raw opium was sold by the penny worth to a class that rarely saw a doctor, their dependence going unnoticed while supply continued. Also the practise of doping children to enable women to work was looked at in terms of an individual failure of the mother, with little notion of the class inequalities that prompted such drastic actions. (9)

A “radical” social medicine view emerged again with the rise of the welfare state and concerns with unemployment, malnutrition, housing and health care. This move within the welfare state towards preventative measures (10) however failed to illuminate the growing burden of chronic illness or the general (ill) health effects produced by unemployment and poverty.

The present dismantling of the welfare state brings with it a return to economic fundamentalism: the dominance of market relationships over all other relationships. In other words, the centrality of social relationships of individual exchange based on self-interest, to the detriment of other forms of social exchange based on ideas of mutuality, altruism and relationship obligations. This carries grave implications for marginalised groups of people, as “social” development and “progress” are subordinated to a system which, over the last few years, has seen large numbers of youth and workers (as well as others on the fringes of the needs of capital), becoming socially discarded—with the result of escalating drug use, gambling and other social problems.

### Harm Reduction

It was also in the early 1980s that there was growing public concern about the rise of “hard” drug use in Australia. The perceived social problems caused by increased drug use throughout this country prompted a government response and in 1985 led to a series of national workshops and the development of policies and strategies. A key component of this strategy (The National Campaign Against Drug Use), now renamed The National Drug Strategy, was to minimise the effects of drugs within Australia (without undermining the economic and political/ideological fundamentals on which it rests).



Bastings St, Northcote

Interventions evolved at the primary health level of health education/promotion, secondary intervention at the level of the containment of harm through psychological counselling and at a tertiary level through methadone and other pharmacological means and by therapeutic communities. These strategies are used in conjunction with legal sanctions such as fines, community based orders and jail sentences.

At a treatment level of intervention, Heather and Tebbutt have categorised the following specific areas:

- Detoxification (now called “drug withdrawal”)
- Pharmacological treatments (methadone and other drug substitutes)
- Behavioural approaches
- Crisis intervention
- Self-help. (11)

It is worth saying at this point that the effectiveness of types of treatment such as relapse prevention, based on harm reduction, is generally unknown or inconclusive, due to the complexity of drug problems. Drug addiction has no single cause; it creates a diversity of physical, psychological and social problems. Notions of motivation and desire to change fluctuate and have different meaning for individuals and there is a high level of relapse, which often undermines any initial achievements. (12)

Harm reduction can be summarised as “a policy or program directed towards decreasing adverse health, social and economic consequences of drug use, even though the user continues to use psycho-active drugs at the present time”. (13) Essentially this approach is derived from the New Public Health Model (NPHM) which emphasises such concepts and strategies as health promotion and education, community participation and wide professional collaboration. (14) In ‘supplanting’ the medical model of disease or health disorder, the NPHM places primary importance on the compliance of the civic citizen through self-regulation and self-control. Accordingly, this model is in essence a moral one which encourages the healthy individual to gain personal satisfaction from being aligned with the public good. Further to this, these authors suggest that whilst seemingly paternalistic, this utilitarian model relies heavily on state regulation and penalises non-compliance for those most at risk of deviation, those “stigmatised or less powerful groups”. (15) It is these less powerful groups that today fill our (sorry, their privatised) prisons and have children in the care of child protection services.

The inter-sectoral networking now increasingly being established between the health/welfare systems and the police and justice systems blurs the traditional boundaries between the major divisions of social control which had long been established within the modern state—that is, between crime and illness. (16) An article



in *VAADA Vine*, the magazine of the drug and alcohol agencies umbrella organisation in Victoria, uncritically outlines this process. (17) Under the initiatives of the Victorian Premier's Drug Advisory Council of March 1996, the government outlined its intention to strengthen drug treatment services offered to offenders both within prison and to those subject to Community Based Orders. This was named the Community Offenders Advice. Another initiative is STEPOUT, the Intensive Post-Prison Release Drug Treatment Service.

One specific outcome of these types of services will be the ability of the State, through the purchaser/provider contract with community agencies, to continue to monitor ex-prisoners and people within the justice systems, whilst appearing to withdraw surveillance. These strategies are likely to continue as Allsop's article certainly suggests, identifying as it does the need to "enhance the role of police in harm reduction and to facilitate collaboration between health and policing sectors". (18) Even though these moves have the potential to dramatically change the nature of drug and alcohol service delivery, workers in the field appear powerless or are reticent to consider these forms of networking problematic and are silent or silenced on changed relationship with many of their clients from "voluntary" to "non-voluntary". The resulting mandatory reporting to correctional authorities now expected from drug and alcohol professionals assumes that those workers take on a policing role as paradoxically the police more and more are taking up the challenge of "social work". As a community legal professional has commented "[t]he new legislation flowing from the Sentencing and Other Acts Amended Act maintains and indeed intensifies this phoney war on drugs". (19) In essence these changes, whilst on the face of it, suggest that users are being diverted from the criminal justice system, drug and alcohol professionals are more and more entrenched within that system as they take over the role of monitoring "consumers" on behalf of the privatised state, to the detriment of their role as 'caring health professionals'.

### Self-Organised Groups

Under the bureaucratic and professionally driven public health model, sits the self-organised (self-help) groups particularly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Al-Anon. These groups do not, under any circumstances, accept government funding, and are therefore "immune" directly from the vagaries of public policies and thus are able to control their own principles, practices and ideologies without outside interference (unlike any agency or worker). Oddly enough, these non-political self-help groups were the first casualties of the new public health campaign as they relied upon unscientific and unverifiable evidence that people could stop using (without professional support). "Abstinence" and "recovery"—the goals of self-help groups—became officially unacceptable (20), as harm-reduction, the new public health strategy, supported only "scientific" approaches to health and health disorders and "science" is a professional enterprise not to be left to lay individuals.

AA as an organisation is the "parent" body of these other groups and sprung into being during the 1930s "depression decade" in North America. AA is esteemed as establishing the basis of "recovery" for people with chronic alcohol problems. In its endeavour to achieve this goal, AA over time recognised that, to be engaged in public policy or indeed any social issue, *as an organisation*, would undermine its potential to help suffering individuals, undermine the organisation itself and damage the unity of purpose for which it was founded. AA has but one primary purpose, to carry the message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers. According to Madsen, AA began as a "crisis cult"

arising from the myth that hard work would ensure individual success, succinctly bringing to full view the dialectical relationship between the self and the social. (21) For Delbanco and Delbanco, the uncompromising individualism of that period was shattered as "the culture of 'self-reliance'... became unsupportable. For millions of people whose best efforts had availed them nothing, the doctrine of self-reliance was now experienced as a form of cruelty". (22)

AA therefore from its beginnings challenged the hegemonic values of this period as well as overcoming the view that alcoholics were in some way morally deficient. In response to the individualistic mind-set of this period, AA developed an organisation and organisational structures that challenged these values, developing within its structure links to the "strong communal counter-theme in American history". While Room, the author of this view, sees the non-hierarchical model of AA (and similar groups) as essentially conservative (because non-hierarchical practises may curtail the ability for organisational change), (23) the motivation, I suggest, is to undermine the procedures of rationalist organisational practises which deny a voice to minorities and which stand in opposition to substantial processes of inclusion. These practices suggests a form of relationship between self and other that undermines utilitarian exchange concepts and formal democratic processes. Certainly this is relevant for many historical "left" principles and practices as well as those of social democracy. Apparently AA's insistence on non-hierarchical norms was based on "the wariness of the possible dangers inherent in the exercise of authority, and even in the fact of organisation itself". (24) It is relevant to recognise that the founders and other early members of this organisation were not covert anarchists, but principled middle-class American men, well aware of the "democratic" structures of Wall Street and other such American icons.

The democratic processes practised within these groups are taken seriously indeed. For example within the NA service structure:

Our fellowship has no authoritarian hierarchy. We create boards and committees solely to serve, not to govern. The various elements of our service structure are guided by our primary purpose and collective conscience of our fellowship and are held directly accountable for the service they do on our behalf. Almost all of our groups, service boards, and committees rotate different members through their service positions, rarely asking one individual to serve in a particular position of responsibility more than one or two terms in a row. The practise of rotation emphasises our fellowship's belief in the value of anonymity in service. NA service is not primarily a personal endeavour, rather, it is the collective responsibility of the fellowship as a whole ... Collective responsibility, not personal authority, is the guiding force behind NA services. (25)

One could argue that the practices within these groups have raised those issues that most recently, on a much larger scale, have been raised within the counter-culture and political movements of the 1970s, as well as within sections of the New Social Movements. As Rothchild-Witt emphasised:

[o]nce firmly established, bureaucracy renders revolution (i.e. a fundamental change in the structure of authority) impossible and replaces with it with mere changes in who controls the bureaucratic apparatus. (26)

The above section has presented a view of these groups that is



rejected by many professionals who believe groups such as AA perpetuate a new addiction (to the group) and at best are a form of after-care once professionals have done the real task. The most obvious problem for people like myself who wandered into these groups was their idea of "god". I was challenged to be open-minded: did not drugs become the omnipresent "god" in my life? Or I was told pragmatically "take what you need and leave the rest." According to Kurtz, the fundamental and first message to people within these groups is that no individual is god, no person has absolute control. And he suggests that this challenges the modernist view of the individual as autonomous. (27)

Aside from all of that, we probably all have people in our lives with drug problems, and are probably baffled, as they may be, by the self-defeating and relationship destroying lifestyle that accompanies such drug problems. Aside from any limitations and shortcomings within these groups, they most certainly offer active support and encouragement, based on their experience of addiction.

### The Present Crisis

In a prophetic piece of writing Jock Young stated, as the legitimisation crisis of the State moved into a monetary crisis:

Availability of a drug alone is insufficient to precipitate addiction, there has to be a meaning for its use ... availability plus the desperation associated with exclusion from the means of earning a living is the sort of combination which might spell a serious heroin problem in the future. The irony is when it comes it will strike hardest amongst the lower class youth ... The middle class ... will have a degree of immunity to the solution heroin offers. (28)

In 1974 Edwards claimed, whilst dwelling on the increased drug use of that period:

When the sudden introduction of a substance with high dependence-inducing properties imposes a particular threat to an unprepared society or when individuals unresponsive to cultural influences, use addicting drugs. (29)

This, Edwards believes, reflects the dynamic equilibrium between the culture and the drugs' effects. Examples of the relationship between social change or crisis and increased levels of drug use include the impact of the industrial revolution on the new working class of the 18th century. The high level of alcohol consumption amongst Aboriginal and other indigenous people is another. Similarly we could conclude that the prevalence of tranquilliser misuse amongst middle-aged women is a response to social displacement and isolation. As Vaillant claims:

One need only examine the interface between Western industrialised cultures and those of developing countries to appreciate that societal change and alcohol (and other drugs) often go hand in hand. (30)

Whilst Edwards' comments on "individuals unresponsive to culture influences" may well have characterised youth during the rise of the "counter culture" and political manifestation of the contestations of the 1960s and 1970s, it certainly could not characterise the rise of drug use amongst the youth of the "fiscal crisis" years which lead to the high levels of youth unemployment that are being experienced now.

### The Australian debate

It is difficult (within this article) to fully explore the growing disrespect of youth, arising through public policy initiatives, that

have seen the loss of educational opportunities and the dismantling of "stable" state school systems alongside blatant attacks on the autonomy of youth through cutbacks to youth and student welfare entitlements, etc. However, these political moves have obviously disenfranchised these future "citizens". They may well have also impacted adversely on the perceived and real social opportunities of many individuals. This situation seems to present fairly ripe pickings for the illicit drug market. By the mid 1980s public awareness of the rise of problematic using led to the NCADA (see above). By the end of this decade there was growing alarm leading to a now decade-long 'legalisation debate' particularly regarding heroin. (Although what is meant by legalisation remains a mystery, at least to the general public).

Australian drug and alcohol academics such as Professor Bill Saunders of (then) Curtin University Western Australia have suggested that heroin per se was not a problem because "those people at relatively little risk from addiction are those who are psychologically robust. Those who get into a mess have bad homes, bad social skills and a lot less going for them." (*The Bulletin*, December 1988). Whilst in the same article Dr Stephen Mugford from the Australian National University stated: "in a world where the driving force is pleasure and consumption, drugs are the ultimate commodities ... some just happen to be illegal." In 1989, in an article arguing for legalisation, "The case for legalising drugs: costs and policy options", Mugford writes: "people are want to use drugs for pleasure" and further that due to illegality: "heroin use may be the undermining of the individuals work or daily life." (31) These are two statements in which the causation of drug use and the effects of illegality are given. However the taking of a drug for pleasure can legitimately be interpreted as an escape from displeasure. For those people trapped within the displeasing cycles of unemployment leading to unemployability, criminality, institutions and jails, heroin may be the only viable option that they know. As Marx remarked whilst debating issues arising from criminal behaviour "is it not a delusion to substitute for the individual with his real motives, with multifarious social circumstances pressing upon him, the abstraction of 'free will'." (32) For those drug users in employment, that Mugford refers to, perhaps the illegal drug using in some way began as compensation or even an alienated resistance to the processes and relationships within capitalist work practises.

I surmise that the problematic use of heroin or other drugs that we are witnessing today is not the cause but the effect of social powerlessness, including apathy and demoralisation thereafter, as the drug using increases and the relationship becomes reciprocal. For those users marginalised through lack of social opportunity, powerlessness corrupts through the internalising of an oppressive social reality. It is this experience of "victimisation" that Lasch suggests destroys any capacity to resist by crushing any ongoing





sense of personal responsibility. "One finally learns to confront life, not as a moral agent but solely as a passive victim. This is precisely the deepest injury inflicted by victimisation". (33) Added to this is the demoralisation of active addiction—in relationship to alcoholism, Fromme called it pathological consumption—where one lives to use and uses to live. Addiction is most certainly a disease or health disorder that mimics the consumer mentality, which is indeed a demoralising realisation for those of us who hoped, in our drug use, to escape from all of that.

It is true that in all societies people, for various reasons, have always used some drugs. In pre-modern societies sometimes for ritualistic reasons and sometimes to still hunger. As noted above, the rise of capitalism saw the widespread use of alcohol and other drugs as a palliative to the working and living conditions shaped by the production process. During the sixties, it was assumed by some (of us) that drug use was an act of rebellion or even a prefigurative activity, beyond domination. This attempt to create pleasure beyond alienation only further connected "pleasure" to the commodity form. We need to ask what is the driving force behind the unhealthy levels of drug use that are exhibited today? Who benefits? And how?

In what way can we as a community effected by drug use and addictions respond in a compassionate manner to people with addictive-health-disorders—without moralising, judging and demonising them as selling out—and, at the same time, protect our communities from state institutions and surveillance. The increased use of government sponsored drug-treatment such as methadone, signals an emphasis on social-control, not compassion nor recovery.

In the American context the expansion of drug use within African-American communities in the early 1980s witnessed community leaders lamenting the rise of government sponsored drugs:

If one sees drugs as basically a way of cutting consciousness, breeding apathy and destroying social involvement and action then one cannot condone the use of an addicting drug whether methadone or heroin, community leaders are concerned about black people getting hooked on methadone with the state as the sole pusher and supplier. (34)

These comments highlight issues of state driven social control and drug companies in "partnership" with (some) professionals responding to social needs and human problems with pharmacology. How have we responded in the past to the "tranquil" medicalisation of life offered to, particularly, middle aged women? How do we respond to Aboriginal and other most alienated youth sniffing petrol and glues—surely this chemical abuse is not rebellious teenage behaviour, something engaged in before settling into an adult life.

In view of my defence of the lay-disease mode: a reflection. Drug-use and misuse may be an attempt to establish contact with our bodies and our spirit. Unfortunately, over time, they become less effective in breaking down alienation as they become increasingly lethal to the body, never mind the endless pre-occupation with thinking about using.

*The author of this article has 15 years experience as a drug and alcohol councillor. He is unable to sign his name to this because of the risk that his agency would be defunded*

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# NATO/U.S. out of Yugoslavia!

**A**s a deadly rain of high-tech bombs falls on Yugoslavia, a deadening rain of propaganda falls on Americans, media-manipulated lies designed to prime the populace into supporting harsher military measures against a sovereign nation, in the name of protecting human rights.

NATO is but a fig leaf for American "interests," and the bombing of Yugoslavia is but a global demonstration of the ruthlessness of the American empire. A demonstration? The monstrous atomic bombing of Japan, after it was virtually beaten in World War II, was not a military necessity, but a political one, designed to demonstrate to the Russians that the U.S. was, and would ever be, boss. It was a massive, deadly demonstration.

So too, the Yugoslavia bombing treats Serbs as the U.S. treated Japanese during the war—as props to demonstrate the power of the empire.

Let us consider the claims that the U.S. is concerned about "human rights" or about the "rights of ethnic minorities," as the corporate press projects hourly. What of America's largest national minority—African Americans? The world-respected Amnesty International group, speaking through its secretary general, Pierre Sane, announced just days before the bombing, "Human-rights violations in the United States of America are persistent, widespread and appear to disproportionately affect people of racial or ethnic minority backgrounds."

Sane was critical of police violence and executions in the U.S. Further, internationally, let's see how the U.S. responds to "liberation movements" of the oppressed. When fighters for Puerto Rican independence began to raise their voices, the U.S. didn't support this "ethnic minority," they sought (and continue) to crush, incarcerate, and silence them.

Consider the case of the Palestinians, the Kurds, the East Timorese, the Colombian rebels—who has the U.S. consistently supported, the oppressed or the U.S.-armed governments?

This isn't about "human rights." It isn't about "ethnic minorities." And it also isn't about "genocide." It's about establishing who's "boss" in the next century. It's about keeping Russia in its place. It's about keeping the European Union under the thumb of Wall Street.

The bombing of Serbia is an echo of the bombing of three other countries in the past six months—of Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan. And for precisely the same reason—to show that it can be done, no matter what so-called "international law" states. It is to instill terror throughout the world, in order for U.S. capital to institute what former president George Bush tried to do, but failed: to establish a New World Order.

Days before the bombing, NATO signed up Poland, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic) as its newest members, thereby virtually isolating Russia. Only Serbia and the Yugoslav states have refused to join NATO—their bombing is their punishment.

Our brilliant, revered nationalist leader, Malcolm X, taught us to examine history. If we look at history, the bombing of Yugoslavia becomes clear.

Empires are maintained, not by reason, but by ruthless terror. It was so in Rome. It is so in the U.S. The brilliant revolutionary, Dr. Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, explained, "The United States was no longer a nation. We called it an empire. An empire is a nation-state that has transformed itself into a power controlling all the world's lands and people." (1973)

Huey was right then, and our response then was to oppose the empire. We must do that now.

Down with imperialism! Stop the bombing! NATO/U.S. out of Yugoslavia!

**Mumia Abu-Jamal**

there is a war  
there is a war  
being fought against idealism  
because nobody wants to think about it  
soon we may find it missing

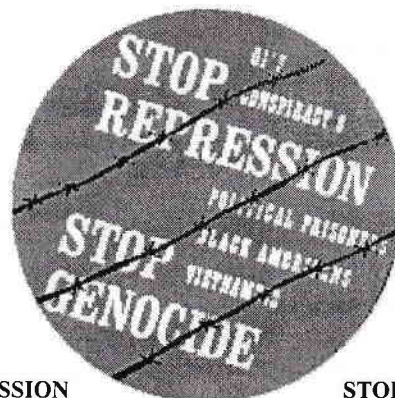
there is a war  
there is a war  
being fought against activism  
because nobody wants to do anything about it  
soon we may find it missing

there is a war  
there is a war  
being fought against compassion  
because nobody cares about it  
soon we may find it missing

a war against inspiration  
a war against information  
a war against civilization  
there is a war

see you there

Ian Mackaye  
(Threat by Example: A Documentation of Inspiration, 1990)



STOP REPRESSION  
GI's conspiracy & Political Prisoners, Black Americans, Vietnamese

STOP GENOCIDE





## Reflections on the Jabiluka campaign

Over the last couple of years, Melbourne has seen a remarkable campaign develop against the Jabiluka uranium mine. The campaign is striking first of all for its longevity. We seem so used to the scenario of the government announcing some atrocity—a few token protests happen—the government goes ahead. The fact that, some three years after the government flagged it was going ahead with Jabiluka, there are still large street protests and some impressive civil disobedience going on, is cause for celebration.

North Ltd (whose subsidiary ERA is building the mine) keeps announcing further delays to production at Jabiluka. They are now saying no uranium will leave the ground until at least 2001. Contrary to much popular mythology, the Jabiluka campaign is one that our side has a reasonable chance of winning.

The main reason for this is the resistance of the Mirrar Aboriginal people, whose land is being dug for uranium at Jabiluka. The Mirrar are refusing permission for the company to mill the uranium ore from Jabiluka off-site at the Ranger mine uranium mill. This is about the only right the Mirrar people have to obstruct the project, but it has put a \$150 million hole in the company's budget for the construction of a new mill at Jabiluka.

The other remarkable thing about the Jabiluka campaign is that, against all sorts of difficulties, Melbourne activists persist in trying to hold together an alliance with the Mirrar people. Anyone who reads the *Herald Sun*, or keeps their ear to the ground, will know that this relationship has had its share of downs as well as ups.

This is not the first campaign to try to tackle these issues, and to nearly or actually come unstuck over them. Why are relationships between Indigenous people and their supporters so fraught?

We should start by recognising that what the Jabiluka Action Group (JAG) is trying to do is quite difficult. We are a large and sometimes chaotic activist group, which includes everyone from socialists to animal rights activists to union members and Christians. The Mirrar are a clan with 27 adult members, fighting for survival in fourth world conditions some 4,000 kilometres away. English is not the first language of many of the Mirrar. Being very much at the centre of the Jabiluka campaign, the Mirrar (and their organisation, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation) have many, many calls on their time. All of this makes communication and coordination a problem at the best of times.

Further, what we are trying to do has not been done for a long time. When was the last campaign of this intensity, that tried to link mass action in the cities with a remote Aboriginal community? Noonkanbah in 1981? The Gurindji strike in the late 60s and early 70s? A long time anyway.

Because what we are trying to do has very little history, we don't start from a position of mutual trust and goodwill. We can't point to a vibrant history of the left working harmoniously with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands people. In fact, Indigenous people in this country have experienced a long history of white folk coming in, demanding that their goodwill be accepted at face value, and then blowing it in some way. This means that the first response of Aboriginal people to another bunch of would-be



helpers will not necessarily be one of respect or appreciation. In fact, quite the contrary. It would be surprising, under the circumstances, if the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the campaign were *not* punctuated by all manner of blow-ups. There is little way around this other than patience, and not getting put off by the first sign of trouble.

There are many people in the campaign who will insist that groups like JAG deserve more respect from the Aboriginal people we are working with. I tend to disagree. Respect may be a two-way street, but the traffic does not have to flow equally in each direction. We are not starting our relationship from a position of equality, and without this there is little prospect of the "partnership" that many people want to enter into.

Matters are not helped by some of the brittle conceptions of Aboriginal self-determination around. There are those who believe that questioning, let alone arguing with, a particular course of action suggested by Aboriginal people is a manifestation of racism. This position is untenable. As Gary Foley wrote in this magazine recently, Black communities are divided by politics (and class), as are "white communities". And Indigenous people are affected, like the rest of us, by the different ideological currents in society.

To say that actions pursued by Indigenous people must be supported no matter what, is to ignore these facts. And very quickly the person who thinks like this will find themselves in a position where they are getting contradictory messages from different people. The result very often is to fall into confused inactivity.

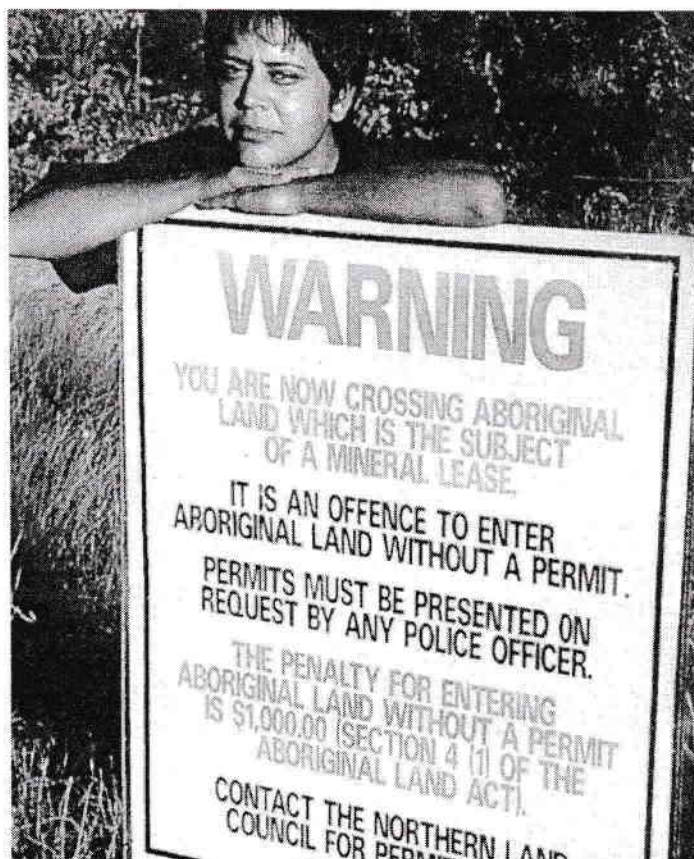
Put like this the sort of work JAG is trying to do starts to sound like a series of contradictory strategies. Don't shut up and "do what you are told", but don't expect your arguments to command much respect. Don't expect to be greeted as the great white saviour, but don't sit mute in terror-struck guilt.

There are clear factors that I can identify as making things easier, in time. We're starting from a base of no history of working together, and hence no trust. Every day, every week, every month that we spend working together in some sort of way, is a chance to improve on that starting point.

This is why despite all the brain-numbing confusion, all the slip-ups and blow-ups, I'm so pleased that JAG has survived, learned and even (touch wood) progressed a little in working with the Mirrar, their representatives, and other Indigenous people. Given the struggle to come in this country, the significance of this process may be felt for a while to come.

**Jerome Small**

[Jerome is a member of Socialist Alternative. He has been active in the Jabiluka campaign in Melbourne for 18 months]



Opposite Page: Traditional owners and protesters at Jabiluka, March 1998

Top right: Jaqui Katona on land subject to the mineral lease

Bottom left: White Australia has a Black History, 1987





## Trade Unionists for Wik

A Federal Court judge took just one minute to rule late last year that the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal people's rights had been "washed away by the tide of history". The Yorta Yorta had filed a native title claim over their traditional lands and waters around the Murray River in Victoria and NSW.

The claim was not, of course, for people's "backyards", but for undeveloped public space, particularly forest. But that didn't stop about 500 individuals, shire councils, clubs and corporations objecting to the claim, backed by the local media and the governments of Victoria, South Australia and NSW. Jeff Kennett likes to bignote himself as an "anti-racist". But he was quick to pour public money into fighting the claim.

The Yorta Yorta are not ones to give up without a fight. They are appealing the decision to a full bench of the Federal Court. This is their 12th attempt to get back control of their land. "We're taking over the struggle of our ancestors. We've resisted over many generations. It's taken the form of walk-offs, sit-ins, petitions to parliament, take-overs," said Yorta Yorta spokeswoman Monica Morgan. "We've not ceded our sovereignty. We've never given way to the invasion." Fellow activist James Atkinson said of the

court's decision: "We played by the rules and all of a sudden someone makes a decision that takes less than a minute to put down."

State governments, pastoralists and the logging industry might be against the Yorta Yorta, but unionists have begun organising solidarity—continuing a decades-long tradition. In March, Trade Unionists for Wik, a campaign endorsed by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, organised a solidarity visit to the Yorta Yorta's cultural centre in Barmah Forest, on the Victorian side of the Murray near Echuca. The Dharnya Centre has been under occupation by the Yorta Yorta since last November in protest at the Liberals' racist ten point plan and Jeff Kennett's parallel state legislation.

The Trade Unionists for Wik delegation included individual members of the Electrical Trades Union, Australian Municipal, Administrative, Clerical and Services Union, Australian Education Union, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Health Services Union, Community and Public Sector Union and an official representative of the National Tertiary Education Union branch at Monash University. Monica and other activists told unionists how the judge had ignored oral evidence from Yorta Yorta people, including elders who had been hurt by the horrors of the stolen generation experience. Instead, he had given weight to the writings of 19th century squatters. His ruling was that the Yorta Yorta had lost contact with their land and customs. His decision shows how native title legislation—supposedly drawn up to right some of the wrongs of the past—is based on a Catch 22. The indigenous people who have been most affected by white settlement are the ones who have the least rights under the law.

Des Morgan, a Yorta Yorta man and local heritage officer, took the unionists around Barmah Forest and the riverside. He showed them how logging practices and increasing salinity in the river was destroying the environment. The Yorta Yorta want a say about this. They want to protect their country for all of us. As Monica put it: "Justice for us is justice for you."

Dave Glanz

Top: Aboriginal Delegation at the ILO, 1987

Left: Swimming at the Moore River, 1948  
Moore River Native Settlement, 150km north of Perth, was described as at its worst, a concentration camp





# One of the boys

**A**fter 20 years of secure, well paid employment with Aussie Post, then Telstra, I've thrown in the towel. Why - in these uncertain times - would anybody throw away a job like that?

Burn out is one reason - too long in one place. The good payout is another - enough to spend some years doing creative, artistic work, rather than just chasing the dollar. But the decisive factor for me is unwillingness to continue fighting against and being isolated by a male dominated, sexist, homophobic culture.

NDC (Network Design and Construction - a 7,000 employee business unit of Telstra) is being hived off to a 100% subsidiary and all its' workers can choose to go to the new company or stay with Telstra to be redeployed or retrenched. Most of the men are going across, but most of the women are not.

Telstra technical work is amongst the most male dominated occupations in Australia. Only 2% are women, often in clerical positions with a technical designation. Management pays lip service to family responsibilities, EEO targets to increase women's participation, etc, but really couldn't care less. I was lucky - my boss allowed me to adjust my hours to suit childcare needs. Generally, management have not been so amenable.

Nobody is "out" as gay, although some of the boys engage in homoerotic banter.

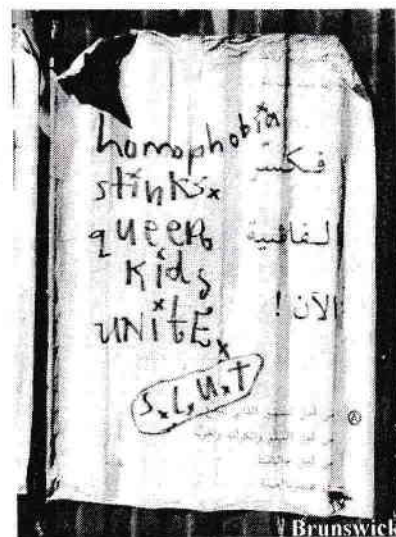
The attitude of my work "mates" is summarised in their attitude to some recent sporting injuries. I suffered severe bruising of my ribs on one occasion and a torn hamstring on another. Because I kept playing, the hamstring injury was made worse.

If my sport of choice was football, there would have been sympathy, shared experiences and increased male bonding. As my sport is dancing, there was derision and further distancing.

Down the pub of a lunchtime, the boys leer out the window passing comments on almost every woman that goes by: "Look at the tits on that!" etc. I have tried to find ways to ignore or subvert the comments.

In 20 years, I have been invited into their home by one workmate - and that was a woman. Marriages, birthdays, barbies, parties - I never seem to make the invite list. It seems that I am a little too queer to be comfortable.

When I first met a workmate while out in drag, the reaction at work was electric. I walked passed his workgroup and heard them talking about me. I retreated into my office and hoped it would go away if I ignored it. Eventually, one or two from that group who were relatively friendly made some half humorous comments and broke the ice. Others did not talk to me for months and an additional distance was created with almost everyone.



I never actually "came out": the word just spread that I was suss.

I am lucky: I am a supervisor and people have to put up with me. In fact "feminine" aspects of my personality were an asset - I would listen to people and was prepared to try to sort out personality disputes.

Women in the workplace have a far harder time. We have one bloke who would get on the piss and go the grope until formal sexual harassment charges were laid. Then the woman who laid the charges was a total bitch, of course. New women had to learn not to be too friendly as the boys would "take it the wrong way". Then they would be condemned for being too aloof.

Women were constantly under pressure to prove themselves, to out achieve the boys to show they were equal. Pressure would be applied to see if they would crack. Any display of emotion was a sign of their inherent instability, but once they achieved "one of the boys" status, they were expected to avoid any expression of femininity. Any small act of affirmative action was immediately regarded as discrimination.

Fighting the prejudice, standing up for women's rights, arguing for childcare needs to be considered - I have made some small difference. But in the end, the work culture has affected me more than I have affected it.

As workers, we have nothing to sell but our labour power. That is then turned against us to destroy us. Instead of a creative expression of our self, work becomes a living hell that twists and embitters us, crushing our dreams and spirit.

Socialist society, the free association of the producers, can change all that. Socialism is not just about ending inequality, but about allowing everyone to express themselves, to reach their potential, to expand what that potential is.

**Riki Revolutskaya (aka Richard Lane)**







# Workers are not disposable

**W**orkers are not disposable was the title and theme of a public forum organised by the No More Intimidation of Teacher Unionists Campaign Committee on 29 November. The forum, endorsed by the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union as well as several members of parliament, attracted a diverse crowd. A highlight was the announcement that campaign supporters had collected 3,000 signatures on a petition to management at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE protesting discrimination against unionists at the college.

A broad range of speakers addressed many facets of the struggle against discrimination and casualisation of the work force. Of the advanced capitalist countries, only Spain has a higher proportion of insecure, casual workers than Australia. A combination of anti-union laws and the deprivations of economic rationalism has enabled employers to dismiss militants and undermine grassroots resistance to the destruction of permanency and other hard-won gains.

A common theme emerged from every participant in the panel: now is the time for a strong campaign to turn around the erosion of workers' rights.

Barbara Morgan is fighting the unfair termination of her contract by her former employer, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE. She related how TAFE Institutes are at the forefront of casualisation, and pointed out that disposable workers means disposable conditions, like long service leave, sick leave and the right to be an active union member.

John Higgins, Deputy State Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, recounted how the union beat off the attempt by Patrick Stevedores and the federal government to dispose of an entire unionised work force. He pointed out that cross-sectoral solidarity amongst unions is crucial when faced with such a sustained attack.

Susan Kenna, a Research Officer with the ACTU Trust, outlined the detrimental effects of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in Local Government. This has not only destroyed permanency in many areas, but has led to a significant degradation in services.

This point was amplified by Paul James, a lecturer at Monash university. In the higher education sector, market driven curriculum has meant a dramatic increase in academic workload and a similar decrease in the quality of education. But at Monash, unionists have refused to accept this agenda. The National Tertiary Education Union and students are campaigning to defend jobs and courses in the Arts faculty.

Pamela Curr, convener of the Fair Wear Campaign, described the ultimate casualisation in the textile industry. The bosses factories are the houses and garages of the hundreds of thousands of pieceworkers who create much of the clothing and footwear

sold in Australia. Although the problem is enormous, through grassroots organising the Fair Wear Campaign has achieved real gains for outworkers. Sustained union and community organising has forced many retailers to sign a code of conduct guaranteeing that all clothing they sell is made by workers who are paid award wages. Forum participants were inspired to hear that the most super exploited and difficult to organise workers were imposing some limits on employer greed.

Leigh Hubbard, Secretary of the Victoria Trades Hall Council, outlined plans for a campaign against casualisation in 1999. He cautioned against a single-issue, simplistic approach, referring to the mistakes from the shorter hours campaign of the late seventies. In that case, the demand was for a 38 hour week to share around the work and increase leisure time. Only the most organised sectors achieved an actual reduction in working hours. For most workers, the campaign meant a reduction in attendance time, merely the payment of overtime rates for an extra two hours. For the least organised, there was no gain at all.

In other words, campaigns for shorter hours have to address staffing levels. Similarly a campaign targeting casualisation needs to address hours of work to avoid the risk that the jobs of casual workers are replaced with more paid and unpaid overtime for the permanent work force.

Concluding the presentations, Alison Thorne, for NMIT Unionists Campaign, put the struggle in the context of the global economic crisis. Employers everywhere are trying to manage the unmanageable crisis by attacking the working class. But even many mainstream economists now acknowledge this approach will not fix the problem. The system needs constant growth but is producing more goods than can be profitably sold. Driving down the wages, benefits and job security of workers in response also drives down their purchasing power, thus exacerbating the dilemma.

The link between casualisation and attacks on the right to be a union activist is now given increased attention by the union movement. The NMIT Unionists Campaign Committee is proud of its role raising the urgency of prioritising the demands of the most marginalised workers. The way to stem the tide of casualisation is to put the needs of casual worker's at the top of the union movement agenda.

**Peter Murray**

NMIT Unionists Campaign Committee

To get involved in the NMIT Unionists Campaign Committee attended our next meeting on 4 May 1999 at 6 pm at 1 Appleby Crescent, West Brunswick, ring Alison on 03 9386 5065 or Delia on 03 9497 1496 for more information.





Bonegilla

## To be un-Australian ...

February was the month when multiculturalism again became a hot media issue. This time it wasn't to celebrate our diversity in response to the racism of One Nation, but it was in the form of strident condemnations of the Kurdish community's protests on the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party.

The mass media was full of condemnation for the temerity of the Kurdish people\* to bring the problems of their "homeland" to the streets of Australian cities and disturb the civility of normal Australian society. Much was said about the violence at these demonstrations, how un-Australian they were, how these people needed to learn our Australian ways, with some of the more outrageous comments calling for the expulsion of these non-Australians.

While the term un-Australian is often loosely defined, its inference is that they, the other side, are not like us, are uncivilised, and are violent. In its appeal to nationalist sentiments, the term serves to marginalise people and discredit their issues from the mainstream "Australian" population by making them seem as social outcasts not worthy of being part of our civilised society.

Given Australia's history where it was created as a penal colony, the state then began a concerted campaign to exterminate the original inhabitants of this continent, to the more recent events such as shooting of striking miners in the 1940s to supporting the dictatorship in Indonesia for 30 years, the rhetoric of a peaceful, civilised society fails dismally the test of reality. Nevertheless, the myth just gets propagated on and on:

Ours is a safe country with little history of political violence ... The concept of furthering homeland grievances by unlawful activity here is alien to our culture. Kurds, above all, should be grateful for that fact. (Editorial, *The Australian*, 18/2/99)

Needless to say, "real Australians" are grateful to live in our lucky country, obey the law of the land, criticise and take up issues only within formal and legal boundaries, are not "violent" and do not take up issues that do not concern them directly (especially ones in foreign countries). Thus, our rulers and opinion makers make use of the un-Australian tag as one of the ways to stifle, direct and manage political dissent into more responsible channels

to decrease its power in challenging the status quo. In the end, the use of the term "un-Australian" is only a sophisticated form of racism as it allows to denigrate a set of people by labelling them as outside the "normal" standards of "Australianness".

While migrant communities often face being accused of being un-Australian, workers and other progressive activists can also feel the wrath of being accused of un-Australian behaviour. Not surprisingly, during the maritime dispute of 1997-98, the Australian Government accused the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) of un-Australian activity during their dispute with Patricks.

Given our rulers' use of "un-Australian" against workers and migrants, it is interesting to note that many of these groups resort to the same language when defending themselves. Thus, while the government accused the MUA of being un-Australian, the MUA leadership itself accused the Australian government of un-Australian activities by its use of anti-strike legislation and use of security guards. More recently during a recent industrial dispute, the striking Gordonstone miners have accused their company, Rio-Tinto, of un-Australian behaviour in its treatment of them.

### To be an Australian

While accusing the government and/or the bosses of un-Australian behaviour might score some political points in the short term and seem a good way to appeal to the "mainstream", it is actually a serious mistake and a flawed strategy. It is wrong because it re-enforces the lie that Australian society is a united and fair society, in which we all have common goals and want the same things, that we all have the same power and means to control our lives, and we are all equally able to influence the wider political debate. In reality, Australian society, like all other capitalist economies, is a class divided nation with huge disparities in wealth and power. Australian laws are made for and by our ruling class, with our indigenous population still fighting for recognition and basic human rights.

By appealing to patriotic sentiments then, we are not only reduced to using the language of the enemy but are also constricting our struggle to an arena where the capitalists have a structural advantage. We, as members of the working class, do not have access to the mass media, the police and the lawyers that our ruling class has. It is our capitalists and their state which not only hold the reins of power and wealth but have also defined, according to their



needs, what are and what aren't legitimate form of protests. Thus, by limiting ourselves to only "responsible", "lawful", "Australian" avenues of struggle and protest, we are not playing "fair" but we are actually playing their game, on their home ground, with their umpires, to their rules.

### **Patriotism is racism**

In the year before the Olympics and the run up to the centenary of Federation, nationalist sentiments are certain to be promoted by our rulers. There will be more and more pressure applied to us to believe that we all live in the lucky country and we should all share in the glory of the Olympics and the celebration of our nationhood. It is very likely that in this climate of nationalistic fervour, the term un-Australian will be used even more as a way to undermine and de-legitimise our aspirations.

For any progressive struggle, it is crucial to escape and challenge the political straightjacket of nationalism so as to expose the reality of our class divided society and unite as many oppressed groups as possible, both in Australia and internationally. Seen from a class and internationalist perspective, patriotism represents the 'flip side' of racism as a method to divide people on the basis of race and culture.

We face the problem that the term "un-Australian" has the power to de-legitimise our issues. We need to actively counter the political message that it carries and not fall for the trap of proving that we are as Australian as them.

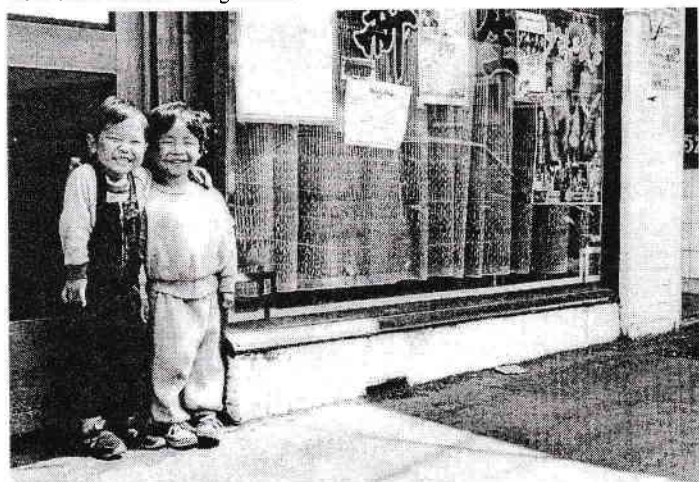
There are no shortcuts or short term antidotes to counter the stifling weight nationalism, with the only way forward being to stand our ground and be counted. Thus, we always have to push forward the simple fact that Australia is a divided society and that different interest groups will have different agendas. We need to stress our human rights as people, both individually and collectively, and our right to advance our interests as a class.

The capitalist system has been an international system for centuries. But now, as never before, the advent of supersonic travel and the advances in telecommunications have made the world a much more integrated and interconnected one. Our interests are not confined within national boundaries. We are able to connect and participate in struggles anywhere in the world. So, while our rulers tell us that we need to compete in a global economy our retort should be that we also live in a global politics and will therefore fight and link up collectively across the globe and so transcend national boundaries.

We only have the world to win.

### **Piergiorgio Moro**

\* For purpose of ease of writing, I use the term Kurdish people even though many of the protesters were born and live here while others were sympathisers from other cultural backgrounds.



## **In whose interests?**

Last year I went to a trade union sponsored forum where John Coombs, the head of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and John Maitland, the head of the Mining division of the Construction, Mining, Forestry and Engineering Union (CFMEU) were speaking on the need for and relevance of trade unions. A lot of the talk focussed on how responsible unions were and how they had done their job in the process of restructuring Australian industry in the 80s and 90s. At the end of the talk, John Coombs had to leave urgently for a press conference, the Dubai scandal was just about to be exposed, and so only John Maitland was left to answer questions from the audience.

I asked a question concerning the role of the union in negotiating flexibility and competitiveness and whether there are any conditions which would not be bargained away. In other words, what is the bottom line for the union.

John answered by saying that unions were always ready to negotiate and that there really was no bottom line, everything was on the table. As he kept talking, and probably realising the significance of what he was saying, John added that his members would probably fight over bargaining away some of the more basic health and safety conditions.

I was surprised by the honesty of John Maitland but at the same time shocked at the implications of his answer. Did he really mean that a bottom line did not exist and that workers' hard won conditions are all on the negotiating table? The meaning of his words were borne out in practice a few months later during the MUA dispute when John Coombs and his team snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by agreeing to job losses and cuts to on site conditions in spite of impressive rank and file support for retaining their conditions.

While many on the left labelled this as a sell out and denounced the trade union leadership as class traitors, such words do not really help us understand why such decisions are made. To understand why two of our most "radical" trade union leaders would think and behave in this way, we first need to examine how trade unions fit in our capitalist society and the role they play.

### **Workers and trade unions**

Historically trade union were, and in most instances still are, formed by groups of workers who, by acting as a collective, try and safeguard their welfare and improve their bargaining power against their employers. Thus, essentially trade unions are a defensive response by workers against the ravages of capitalism.

While trade unions can have very militant periods, and in certain historical times can even play a revolutionary role, their rationale is to represent workers against their bosses' attempts to increase the rate of exploitation and increase profits. Seen from this perspective, trade union leaders are not there to defeat the bosses, takeover the workplace or other such revolutionary actions, but they are there to mediate the class struggle between employers and workers. In other words, to seek a compromise.

As highly paid agents of the working class, one of the main jobs of trade union leaders is to meet, discuss, negotiate and compromise with capitalists and interested government authorities, on their members' wages and conditions. By their role as mediators, union leaders often spend the majority of their time in "high powered" meetings and consultations where what is discussed is not the state of the class struggle but the minutia of government policies, the profitability of companies, the specific wording of



huge tomes of labor law and the need to be responsible in order not to harm the smooth running of the national economy. Thus, union leaders begin to see their role more as partners in the smooth running of the economy, in conjunction with the capitalists and the government, than in defenders of the working class in an antagonistic struggle with the capitalists. In Australia, this function had its highest expression in the Accord years of the 1980s, but is found in many other capitalists economies, under names such as National Tripartite Commission.

In addition, as trade unions operate at a local level, or at best at a national level, they tend to have an inward and nationalist perspective of where their interests lie. Therefore, they tend to identify the interest of workers with that of the state of the national economy and therefore they will be susceptible to pressures to conform, to be responsible and to make sacrifices for the good of the national economy.

### Militant Unionism

While acknowledging the fact that there is a great variation between unions and their leadership teams, with some much better at defending their members' interests than others, there are quite clear limitations to even the most militant of unionism. For instance, the recent example of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) is a very good, contemporary example of the political limitations of trade union struggle.

The KCTU was until very recently an illegal trade union federation which developed, under long periods of martial law, during the 1980s and 90s. The KCTU has always represented the most politically conscious workers in South Korea, and has always been ready to wage a militant and violent struggle against the full force of the state. Thus, the KCTU was often identified as a revolutionary organisation as it repeatedly clashed in street battles against the Korean police, army and the navy.

In 1997, the Asian crisis hit the South Korean economy very hard, leading to massive job losses and economic dislocation for the Korean society as a whole. The response of the KCTU was immediate. It called for a series of mass strikes and a cessation of the lay-offs. The government countered not only with the normal repressive measures but, in response to the depth of the economic crisis, also played the nationalist card by saying that unless all of South Korea pulled together and made sacrifices as a nation, total collapse would follow. Needless to say, the sacrifices were made by the workers with many of the giant Korean corporations bailed out by the state.

Nevertheless, such appeals had a tremendous effect on the KCTU which became embroiled in sharp internal conflicts between choosing to represent its members' interests and fight the austerity measures or to go along with the government and put the "national interest" above its members' interests. The resultant accommodation of the KCTU leadership towards the "national interest" though, created dissent within the membership to such an extent that during late 1997 and mid 1998, the leadership of the KCTU was voted out twice in extraordinary general meetings, with a totally new team taking charge each time. With the unemployment rate nudging three million, the ability of the KCTU's to protect its members' wages and conditions will be tested, as unions face continued pressure from the government and capitalists not to oppose economic reforms and to act responsibly.



### Conciliation or conflict

Given that trade unions are essentially a defensive organisations which are not geared to advancing the class struggle to a higher political level, where does that leave us workers who are not just interested in seeking a few more crumbs from the capitalists' table?

I think the first thing is to recognise the limitations of the present structures and develop a program that will push these boundaries back allowing us more political space. We must learn from our defeats and instead of accusing leaderships of selling out, we need to analyse the reasons for our inability to intervene effectively in struggles such as the MUA dispute. In this way, we will be able to identify our weaknesses and strengths so that in the future we will have strategies influence the class struggle in our favour.

It is up to us, as rank and filers, shop stewards, organisers and activists to always pressure our labour leaders to negotiate the best deal possible, whether from inside the union structures or as outside pressure groups. We must always be aware of our leadership's attempts "be responsible", and be ready to intervene and implement a strategy that will advance our interests as a class independent of the interests of the capitalists. The day that we, collectively as a class, are strong enough to defeat the whole conciliation process, trade union leaders will need to decide whether they are with us or against us.

What will be crucial in finally getting rid of the capitalist system, will be the political organisation that we are able to develop that will articulate, co-ordinate and fight for our collective interests.

### Piergiorgio Moro

Opposite Page: Victoria St, Abbotsford, 1984

Top: Bluestone quarry south of Bell St, Preston, near Darebin Creek, c1930





Loggers using a crosscut saw, c1920

# The Main Game

**Richard Wahl interviewed Jane Calvert, State Secretary, CFMEU Forestry Division for Rank and File News.**

**How did you become the Secretary of your division?**

I come from the shop floor. I originally joined what is now part of the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union (CFMEU) in the mid-1970s when I took up an apprenticeship as a french polisher. I worked on and off in that industry after my apprenticeship for another 10 years. That was in Queensland and I was a shop steward on the shop floor during that time. Later, I moved to Melbourne and took up a job with Australia Post as a postie.

My union nominated me for training where rank and filers come in and work with unions. I naively came out of that thinking, well, the job of an organiser is pretty much just being a shop steward 24 hours a day. I was interested in having a go at a full time job at the union. A vacancy came up in the furnishing trade union. I got appointed as an organiser and did that job for some years. Later, I came back into the CFMEU via a job as an enterprise bargaining officer with the Timber Workers Union and from there became an organiser with this branch of the union and then an Assistant Secretary, then Secretary.

I have never worked anywhere where I wasn't in the union and active in the union. I guess that was probably also encouraged by being a worker in Queensland during the 70s and 80s when there was quite a lot of movement activity. It was by necessity up there, with a hostile government under Bjelke Petersen. I think there was a sense of a trade union movement and community coalition that you probably didn't have in other states at that time. That was a good and fairly fertile learning ground for young activists on the shop floor because you got involved in broader movement type struggles.

**Have you been active in politics in general outside the trade union movement?**

Oh yes, I was active in the women's movement. I was involved in the early days of the women's shelters in Brisbane. When I was at Uni, I was actively involved in student politics. In Queensland, I was also involved in struggles around land rights. In a smaller place you had to be involved.

**What sort of acceptance do you have amongst your members as a woman?**

My view has always been, and my experience has pretty much always been, in the areas where I have worked, if a union official does the job properly it doesn't matter who they are or where they come from. There hasn't been openly a questioning of "how come you're there, why are you doing the job" and I'd like to think that's because what I'm doing is relevant and driven by workers in our industry and our members.

In the old timber industry and in the furnishing industry, there have always been women working. Certainly out in those country areas where often our industry is the only employer, women are involved in the industry by necessity if nothing else. If you go right out into the bush, the nucleus of that is family businesses and small businesses, and women are involved in those industries and often run all the business side of it.

It's genderised. There's obviously more women at the production end than there are in the trade end, but there have always been women in the mills—a minority but they have always been there and so I guess that's probably created an acceptance that you might not find in, for example, the construction industry. But certainly it is a first for our industry or our union to have a woman secretary.

**What is the structure of the forest based industries? I understand that mainly it is contractors who employ your members, particularly in the bush.**

From harvesting to getting to the mills, that's pretty much done on a sub contracting basis. Traditionally in Victoria this was through the state government who owned the trees as a public asset. It no longer so much is. Plantations have been sold off. Much of the hardwood is still in government hands but increasingly there's a private ownership of some of the hardwood, especially the plantation hardwood.

The harvesting is contracted out to the bush workers, as we call them. They usually run on crews anything from 6 to 30 people most of whom would be employees, some of whom would be contract cartage people, like truck drivers.

So, it's an interesting and challenging place to unionise, because they're small businesses really. And you can't approach it in the



traditional way you might approach a workplace where there is a clearly identified employer and an employee. They work side by side each day, the boss is there, the contractors are hands on people. You can't use a traditional manufacturing-based approach to organising.

We say it is important to organise those workers. We join up the contractors and the crews, we enter into a protocol arrangement with them, so if there's a dispute, we have a disputes procedure. We face that initially by trying to resolve disputes on a local level and keeping it as local as possible, but at the end of the day we have an arbitration system, not through the commission, but through the union and the contractors and the workers.

With the contractors we say we will help you negotiate your rate with the state government. Recently the state government instead of directly contracting out they've gone through syndicates and many of those syndicates are made up of sawmillers. There's obviously an immediate conflict of interest between a sawmiller who wants to get the timber through the mill for as cheap as possible and the people who then can control the contract with the harvestors. So we set ourselves up as giving expert assistance to the contractors in those negotiations. Part of what we've done is help negotiate the rate between the contractor and the syndicate and build into that rate a formula that says for every increase that the contractors gets a component gets passed on to the employees.

In terms of debates about how much gets put into reserves and how much gets put into productive use, everyone's in the same boat there. It doesn't matter if you're a contractor or a worker on the ground. So in that debate the union represents the holus bolus on that basis.

For many of these members the parliamentary political process has immediate relevance to them because at the stroke of a pen the government can wipe out hundreds of jobs, can wipe out whole sectors of their industry. So in terms of working in a union, that is a blessing as well as a pain, but it's a blessing because you can say to workers politics is relevant to you, you have to be involved in the political process because someone sitting in Canberra or Spring Street in Melbourne can influence your job, your livelihood, your community, with the stroke of a pen. So it's an exciting place to work for me as a trade unionist. You don't find that when you walk into a furniture factory for instance. You have to really build that connection for workers, whereas for our bush workers it's very easily grasped.

**So what is the outlook for your bush workers? Are there intractable problems there?**

We reckon that there can be a sustainably managed and viable native forest harvesting industry. There are a whole lot of environmental groups who say, no you can't, you've got to lock it all up, and you can only go plantation. And there are a whole lot of environmental groups who don't think that plantations are the answer. We'd sit in

a place where we'd say there can be both plantations and an industry that utilises, productively utilises, native forests.

Coming from there the question for us is, how do you ensure that it is sustainably and properly managed. And in that debate you actually have to take a global perspective, because the harder it gets to maintain an industry here because of pressures from the environmental movement, then more damage gets done to countries in the Asian region—you export the problem. So we need to take a step back and think about not only what forests are here and how they're managed, but also what's happening globally.

I think here in Victoria, we're always open to discuss where people think the industry isn't been managed properly or isn't being operated sustainably. I think that sometimes we don't get the space to do that enough with a lot of the environmental activists because we're continually fighting it out at a coup. The Otways is a good example. We recently had a blue down there where blockades were put up on the coup. The coup's the workplace for us. There are health and safety problems immediately if people are running around the bush who aren't authorised operators. Our members don't feel comfortable felling trees when they think someone's going to run onto the coup. Plus, they are being paid piece rates. So if they're not working they're not being paid.

There might be a whole lot of areas where we could usefully sit back and talk to local groups about how they view the industry and its relationship with the rest of the community. But as unionists, if someone's got our members bailed up and they're not allowing them to work or they're disrupting the health and safety of the workplace, that's my priority. I don't have the luxury while that's happening to sit down and say let's take a view about what you're saying.

**I read you comments along the lines of it will never be sorted out at this level.**

I appreciate the role that direct action plays in a campaign. I understand from an environmental activist's point of view direct action is going to be effective. But I challenge them to try and find different ways of doing it rather than attacking workers at their workplace. You take your direct action out to the tree you take a photo of the tree, it looks beautiful, you take a photo of a coup that's been felled it looks bloody ugly for the first five or ten years—so it's effective. But the challenge we put out to activists in the environment movement is think about whether you're prepared to interfere with workers at their workplaces in order to make your effective protest, or is there some other way you can do it as effectively or nearly as effectively.

**Is a false demand being created for the products of native forests that works against sustainability, particularly in terms of things like woodchipping?**

The process of woodchipping provides a valuable adjunct. You're always going to have waste from a round tree. Traditionally, a lot of that had been left to rot or been burnt, but by woodchipping you're value adding to the industry and making it more viable. From the union's point of view, we would say that woodchipping has a valuable role to play as long as the industry is driven by job creation and local value adding here.

The danger in the next five to ten years is the Federal Government pulling out and saying we have this Regional Forestry Agreement that sorts out the jobs versus environment arguments, we can step back now and we can remove all export woodchip and log controls and leave the industry to chug along.

I don't think that's going to achieve the best deal for Australian







workers and communities. Capitalism is global and the players in our industry don't give a shit whether the jobs are done here, or whether just the trees are grown here and then they're exported to wherever. And unless they're forced by a government that says you can't have access to that resource unless you're prepared to value add to it here, unless that happens, we really are leaving ourselves exposed to a situation where Australia is just seen as a paddock where trees are grown and exported as whole logs or woodchips.

That's a debate about management of the industry. We have to have a properly run industry council where organised labour has a position at the table. It's not a debate about whether you woodchip or not. We want the room to sit down and talk about how we manage the industry properly rather than just having a simplistic debate about whether you cut down a native tree. A lot of environmentalists I know say don't cut it in the first place, because we like the tree, we want to look at it, we don't want to use it. That's a pretty fundamental philosophical question. Where I sit in that and where our union sits in that is we say you can use it. Trees aren't there just to look. Once you've set aside those things that need to be set aside, like rainforest, old growth, etc.

**What's that view driven by? Is that because of a concern for a way of life and a livelihood? Is that why you feel that way about it?**

I suppose I can only look at it from where I sit and that is as a trade unionist who represents workers under a capitalist system and from our point of view workers don't have the luxury to sit and look at a resource. Under this current system and way of living in this society, you use that resource, provided you use it sensibly to create a livelihood for workers. That's the system we're in. We live under a capitalist system, under that system workers make their means of living by selling their labour. I know there's a whole other lot of perspectives on that. And a whole lot of very legitimate concerns, for example for Aboriginal land rights. We would certainly have concerns to respect those issues and engage in a dialogue about that. I think our industry hasn't traditionally done that adequately.

**Are there any groups or people involved in the environmental side of the argument who are willing to discuss things in ways that involve the workers in the industry?**

Yes, absolutely. Locally I know we've had discussions with some of the members of Earthworker and from time to time Friends of the Earth. There's a local green group out in the Wombat Forest area who are certainly coming more from that perspective. We don't often get the luxury of sitting down and talking about it because often we're on the battle lines with each other. But, I do know that certainly those differences exist in the environmental movement, it's made up of a whole range of diverse views and

ideas.

**What's happening in the industry in terms of jobs at the moment and union membership?**

We're holding our own in terms of union membership. There has been a big loss of jobs over the last four years. That's been across softwood and hardwood. The problem's not with the resource, the problem's with the lack of market development and the lack of government and industry council involvement in trying to look at what happens with the resource. In my view we have a responsibility as unionists and the industry, the employers, the state and federal governments and local councils, etc, have a responsibility to ensure that the resource and the industry is given a chance. The real gap in what's happening in our industry at the moment is what happens to the resource once it's harvested. So that's our passion at the moment. The current state and federal governments see private enterprise as being able to sort its own problems out and that free market forces will allow the best outcome. I absolutely don't agree with that. I think it's an entirely irresponsible approach to how we use our resource.

**How does the union see itself using its political weight. Do you think you have political weight?**

Part of the passion of working in a union is seeing that workers do have political weight, the power to change things. And that's true on a workplace level. It's only the collective effort of workers that will ever change things at a local workplace level. I think that political weight is there in our own forest section. But I also think as part of the CFMEU we gain a whole lot of momentum to that. You compound the weight that you might have as either a construction worker or a forest worker or a miner or an energy workers. I'm pretty proud of the way the CFMEU members do actually stick together and use that political weight.

The structure of our union is such that we have an autonomous divisional structure, so we, on our own issues, operate fairly autonomously, but we obviously rely on the collective strength of all of the divisions and that's always been there.

In relation to the resource component of our industry and the debates around that, for us as a union, I've got to be honest and say, it really hasn't mattered which party is in power. Workers in our industry have faced the same kind of problems around the resource issue. It's just been an absolute political football, trees and forests are a political football at times. So we as a union have to see ourselves as needing to organise around that resource issue. No matter who's in power, we don't relax.

In terms of when Labor was last in power, while gains were made during that time, if those gains are made purely by the peak body and workers haven't had any involvement in it, they won't





be passionate about hanging on to it, or won't see that the need to hang on to a whole lot of stuff. So I think enterprise bargaining has allowed a whole lot of trade offs to happen that shouldn't have happened, and the ground for that to happen has been that workers weren't involved in making those gains. It's a perverse thing to say, but I'm not uncomfortable as a unionist that we're now in a position where we have to fight every inch of the way. Because it's that which actually gives workers a sense of why they should collectively organise. Not that you want to have a view that people have to go through pain to get anywhere, but the union movement did lose a lot of it's ability to organise during Labor's time in power and when you look at what the gains out of that were, they've been so quickly lost and unravelled by the coalition.

#### More broadly, what is your attitude to the Labor Party?

I think there's a role for them to play. Parliamentary politics is not an unimportant thing for workers, clearly whether it's resource issues or industrial issues. We should as a movement have influ-

ence over that. It's important to say thought that there is a real lack of relevance for our members in the bush in the ALP. More of the focus now is on the independent local candidate. Independents are having more success amongst our members out in the bush than an ALP candidate or the coalition candidate.

I think that in Victoria, it's a good time for the union movement to have a bit of breathing space to reconsolidate itself as an independent voice. And I think we aren't doing that as vigorously as we need to. I think a lot of trade union leaders are still being very distracted by the machinations of the Labor Party. We should basically be re-focussing on what our main game is, which is organising workers and re-grouping about what our voice is and what our focus is as a movement. We all need to make sure, through our peak union bodies or Trades Hall or our own unions or our own very small branch, that we keep saying, well what is the main game, the main game is organising workers and making gains for workers, helping workers make gains in wages, conditions, health and safety, jobs, job security and other issues of relevance to them and we've got to do that, we've got to do that well.



Top Left: Lygon St, Brunswick

Bottom Left: Cutting the trunk of a Karri for transport to the mill, WA

Left: BLF Green Bans, 1974

## Earthworker

Challenging the jobs versus environment debate is the main emphasis of Earth Worker, according to secretary Colin McNaughton. Colin who was recently appointed the CFMEU Building Division's delegate to the new green/union alliance, sees this as a crucial starting point in getting jobs and the environment onto the political agenda.

Earth Worker is an alliance of trade unions, green groups and community organisations, based at the Victorian Trades Hall. Fourteen Victorian trade unions have already joined or are in the process of joining the alliance. Friends of the Earth and the Wilderness Society are affiliated, and a number of other environment groups are set to join.

Earth Worker doesn't underestimate the cultural differences which currently exist between unions and green groups, trade union activists and environmental activists. Making the alliance real will require work to find commonalties, and build up the trust needed to learn from each other. "It is essential that we accept differences do exist between us, while we learn to work together," according to Colin.

One of the tasks of Earth Worker is to make people think differently about ecology - about the urban and the social parts of the environment question. At a practical level, Earth Worker aims

to bring the resources and experience of the world-wide green movement to the task creating "green" jobs and value-adding. Practical sustainable alternatives already exist, but this information has previously been difficult for unions to access.

Earth Worker locate themselves within a tradition of social movement unionism - unionism that actively works to transform society, and to take action in the community as well as in the workplace. This kind of activism aims to bring the social power of workers to the task of creating a just and sustainable future. "Bringing unions closer to community-based organisations is a way to increase the relevance of unions and to make unionism real to young people," Colin believes.

Currently Earth Worker is engaged in a number of projects, including developing environmental training for unionists on an industry by industry basis; the creation of a database giving unions access to best thinking about alternative practices and products; the creation of an alternative energy plan and a speaking tour of prominent unionists and environmentalists such as Jack Mundey and Bob Brown, which will contest the divisive nature of the jobs versus environment debate which governments and corporations use as a divide and rule strategy against both unionists and greens.





Boys playing near Broken Hill, c1910

## A better life

Kevin Dunion is chair of the executive committee of Friends of the Earth International and active in the environmental movement in Scotland. He was interviewed by Matthew Abud during the Global Survival and Indigenous Rights Conference, held in Melbourne from 20-22 November 1998.

**How do wider social issues and issues of civil society overlap with environmental issues in Scotland?**

I think the biggest issue we've confronted is that so-called rational decision taking always seems to end up with its greatest impact upon people who are already in difficult circumstances, so open cast mines, land fill sites and waste incinerators always end up being situated next to people in low income households. Somehow they never seem to end up next to people who have middle class homes and middle class jobs.

Another major issue really in terms of civil society is that in Scotland, we have grown up with a kind of dependency culture. First we were dependent upon the gentry, then we were dependent upon those with wealth to take decisions and what happened in 20th century was that we passed that dependency on to elected officials.

One of the difficulties we have confronted is the idea that people who are, even from the left, Labour elected councillors somehow feel that's the end of democracy—they've been elected in and they represent the people and that's the end of the matter. Even when the system fails them, even though it's sometimes corrupt.

What we've said is that essentially the people have a say in decisions that are taken on their behalf and that their expertise is listened to and this is particularly true of planning decisions, for example with building or major infrastructural developments. It's also potent in terms of things like public health where very often people feel and perceive there is as a problem, but officialdom tells them that it isn't and yet over a number of years its been shown that people's gut instincts and lived experience is correct.

**Can you give a couple of examples of campaigns or issues where this has been demonstrated?**

A major campaign in the west of Scotland was on the issue of contaminated land. This particular community were not only convinced that they were living on contaminated land but that it was effecting their health. Official records showed nothing and it was only when you sat down and did some testimonies with local people that it became apparent that many of them had worked or had relatives who had worked in a chromium factory and that chromium waste had been dumped illegally all over the area.

When site investigations were done it was found that old people's homes and gardens were actually built upon these chromium wastes. Then public health officials said that there was no significant impact even though the levels of chromium were well above levels where you would expect to find cancers. Again we were able to challenge that study to show that it was massively underfunded and had never been done with any investigation on the ground and only by postcode.

Two other recent campaigns we've had were about two landfill sites in a town near Airdrie in Scotland. The local people had been assailed by appalling smells and feeling ill and nauseous and were convinced that both these sites were operating badly. We were making no real headway with the company and certainly not with the local authority. So we worked with the local community and we simply blockaded the sites. For a week we turned away all of the lorries bringing the contaminated waste.

What brought this to a head was that the company had successfully tendered to bring PCB contaminated soils from England which were too toxic to dump in England there but through a loophole in Scottish law could be dumped in a Scottish site. The company was desperate to resolve this. It was costing them a fortune and so they agreed to an independent survey of the site and this, showed that over 120 failings which the company have agreed to put right, including very bad practices in terms of sampling for contamination.



Even more dramatic was the other landfill site. We also blockaded that and, because of the strength that we had, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency came out and closed down the site down within a day, finding grievous mistakes.

Now the issue there in terms of civil society is that the institutions which were meant to protect us and the people, the local authority, the planning authority and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency had failed in their job and it really required people to put themselves in this to force them to do the job they've been paid to do.

**Has this kind of strategy become central to the environment movement in general in Scotland?**

No, I think it's particular to Friends of the Earth. I think the reason for that is threefold. One is that we're oriented towards working with communities on the ground and for the long term. Secondly, we are prompted as much by social and health concerns as we are by direct environmental impact. Thirdly, we are prepared to work with the community to look at what could be better—what would be a better life for them and not just fight a campaign of resistance and work away from it. I think that investment in the future as well as tackling the present problems is also what marks us out.

**So, in terms of going beyond the campaigns of resistance, does this approach lead communities to become more focused and clarify ideas about how they want to live in the future?**

Yeah, two things that we have invested heavily in when working with these communities to give them the confidence in not just challenging authority but to challenge it effectively. We're helping them to understand environmental science, environmental law and to bring them together with other communities elsewhere in Scotland who have faced similar problems and who have successfully tackled them, so we bring them together with other campaigns against open cast sites or land fill or water pollution.

Then secondly what we do is have a sustainable development community worker sit down with the people and together they map the community using various techniques. From that we try to map out what kind of economic development would be appropriate, what would be the priorities for tackling the environmental problems in the area.

**So you tackle these issues through participatory local democracy?**

Yeah, who takes decisions is critical in that process. If you map your community to say "well what does it actually look like," then you find that the participation of people like the milkman and the paperboy is critical because they know where everybody lives. These processes tend to exclude people who presume they speak on behalf of the community and dominate like the local councillor who perhaps is not actually as aware as the local people.

**Are environmental issues in Scotland generally seen as part of social issues or are they seen as something separate?**

I think it would be wrong to say that we'd moved from one position to another because they do mix. There are groups like ourselves who are trying to ensure that environmental issues are incorporated into social decision taking.

One of the difficulties we confront quite frankly is that the whole idea of sustainable development has become tortured in its definition and we are getting groups who are getting money for

doing sustainable development work who wish to see the environment removed from that equation. Groups who argue that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of the environmentalists and we need to swing it back in favour of the social and economic issues. Our argument is that social and economic have always been the dominant issues and the whole point of sustainable development was to make sure that the environment was taken into account.

We mean the environment not in terms of site specific impacts on forests or rivers, but we mean living within the resource constraints of development and what we've been trying to define in Scotland is an understanding that however you approach your issues—from a social, economic or environmental perspective—you have to respect the constraints of resource use and that's your resource availability. It would be going too far to say that that had become mainstream yet in Scotland.

**What kind of advantages do you think the environmental movement has in putting this sort of perspective forward in comparison to other economic or social demands for change. Do you think there's an advantage there?**

I think that we have reflected much more upon it than the other movements in our society. I really think we're the only group who actually do recognise that there are constraints. Even within the left in politics in our society there's a feeling that there's a problems to be solved and resources can be found to solve it. Or there's a problem to be solved and we can hive it off elsewhere.

Take for example the issue of open cast mining. The government has in the face of an enormous campaign by groups like our own finally done an about turn and said there will be no presumption in favour of open cast mining and we can expect to see major cutbacks in Scotland. But they're not doing anything to tackle carbon emissions from fossil fuel burning power stations. So the consequence of that decision is simple to displace the extraction to somewhere else, like Poland for example. So the environmental movement in Scotland is the only one that has put a European or indeed global perspective and said it is not a solution to our problems or indeed the world's problems simply to put them in a more peripheral part of Europe. I think that's extremely important. Because we're already seeing the effect of traditional green politics in places like Netherlands and Germany where they are doing exactly that, they're protecting their environment by despoiling ours. That's an issue.

I think we've got to make alliances and I think we have to make alliances at a mature level. We've worked hard to make alliances with the anti poverty movements in Scotland and to work with communities which are on the periphery and we're working against a stereotypical belief even with activists who say that the environment is not an issue for the people they work with. We've been able to demonstrate that's an absolute falsehood.

It's for obvious reasons. People living in cold homes in Scotland, of which there are 400,000, they want warmth. But they don't want warmth just by burning more coal or burning more gas. First of all they can't afford to do that. And secondly they do understand environmental issues. So they do want warmth through better quality and more fuel efficient housing.

We work with colleagues in the an office next door to us who do very practical projects. They worked with two hundred households in two peripheral housing estates in Edinburgh. The project was to ask these 200 households to keep an energy diary, every time they turned on a kettle, every time they turned on a light switch, every time they opened the fridge door, to document this. And we were told this would never ever work, people weren't concerned about the environment, they wouldn't keep to the



discipline of this, who the hell were we to come into these communities and so on.

Of the 200 households, only two failed to fulfil the project over a quarter of a year. We then got a phenomenal record of practical energy use and what was using the most energy. Each of these items was separately metered, so we could see what the fridge was using and we could see what the kettle was using, what the cooker was using, and so on. And the outcome was startling. It showed that the most energy efficient appliance in the household was the fridge. But in most poor houses the fridge is traditionally 10-15 years old, the seals are broken and the engine is inefficient. The second stage of the project was to give new fridges to these households in return for the old ones, paid for out of a levy on the power companies in Scotland. And a spin off from that was because we were giving away so many fridges we could then go to the manufacturers, and say we want these fridges to be even more energy efficient, we're now your biggest customer and we're using our customer power to improve the energy efficiency of the fridges.

**Do you see a legacy of a greater sense of empowerment or optimism in communities which have been involved in campaigns, say around land fills or toxic waste dumps?**

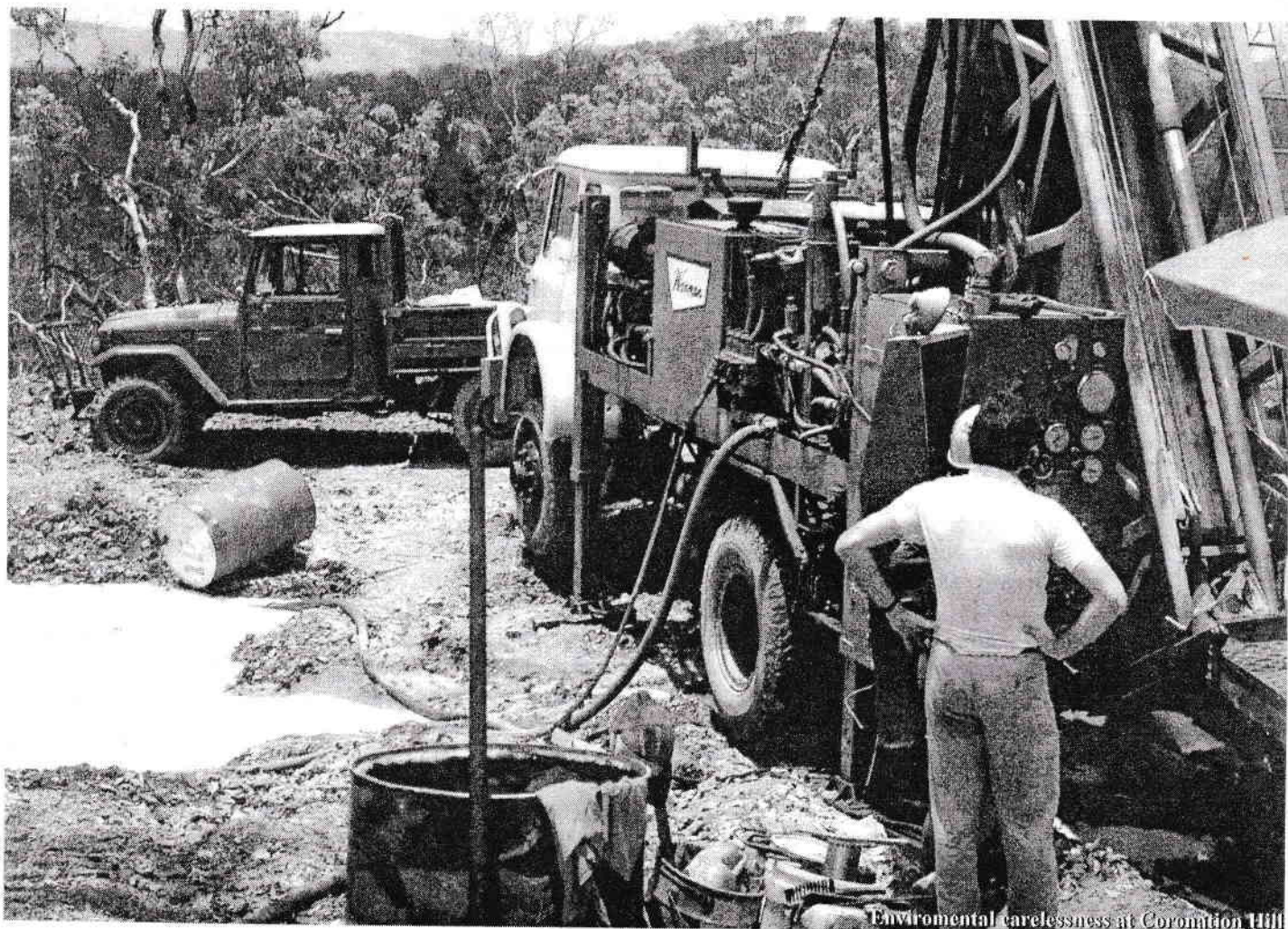
I think the biggest thing that comes out to us is people's sense of worth in terms of the knowledge that they have. I remember one occasion, a councillor saying to the community "we may have a problem, but we'll only know that when the experts look at it" and the community turned round and said, "no we are the experts." And that's the confidence that we've given them, that they actually felt it was perfectly all right to say we know there are four households in this street with cancer or we know where stuff is dumped, we've not done scientific sampling but we have been

given the confidence to believe that this is expertise. And I believe that's the essence of what we've been able to do is to give communities confidence to use the knowledge that they have within them.

**Finally what about your own involvement. Why did you become involved in environmental issues and come to see these within a wider social context?**

In terms of my family background, my grandfather was a coal miner and my family lived in a not particularly attractive part of Scotland. It's very heavily dominated by heavy industry. So even as a child I thought there must be something better than this. But really what developed my thinking was working for seven years for the aid agency Oxfam. I went in 1985 to India and became very impressed with the work of the Centre for Science and the Environment. And indeed, the way that the Indian environmental movement were able to link social and environmental concerns and their commitment to citizen's voices. Campaigns that are commonplace now such as against deforestation in the Himalayas and in the south of India against the Narmada Dam. These came from citizen's groups not from academics or experts or environmental movements. The Narmada Dam for example, started with a medical problem when the people became aware of sicknesses and diarrhoea which was caused by the effluent from the worker's camps being flushed into the river.

When I looked at the environmental movement six or seven years later I was really quite struck by the gulf between the social movements and environmental movements and really I still don't think I'm widely regarded as an environmentalist. I've got a good friend in FOE who says "you're not really an environmentalist." And I think that's an accolade.



Environmental carelessness at Coromption Hill





# Revolution as Strategy

Did the French Revolution fail? Did the Russian Revolution fail? These are two questions that at one time might have seemed absurd. They no longer seem absurd. But how does one answer such questions?

Revolution is a strange word ... In the Marxist tradition ... revolution has been firmly ensconced within a linear theory of progress. Victor Kiernan captures it best, I believe, when he asserts that it means a "cataclysmic leap" from one mode of production to another. Still, like most concepts, merely defining it is insufficient; it must be placed in opposition to some alternative. And, as we know, again in the Marxist tradition (but not only), the alternative to "revolution" is "reform".

Reform versus revolution came to mean, in the debates of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, slow aggregative change versus swift change, small-scale changes versus large-scale change, reversible change versus irreversible change, improving change (which is therefore prosystemic) versus transforming change (which is therefore antsystemic), and inefficacious change versus efficacious change ...

There is, in additional ambiguity within the Marxist tradition itself. Marxists often made a distinction between a political revolution (which could be a surface phenomenon) and a social revolution (the real thing). In addition, Marx and Engels themselves were not averse to using the word *revolution* for such concepts as *industrial revolution*, and even to suggest that the "industrial revolution" was more important or more fundamental than the "French Revolution." This suggestion was of course quite consonant with the basic philosophical bias of historical materialism, but it was not necessarily a great succor to voluntarist political action. Hence it was that revolution came to symbolize more and more in the tradition of the Marxism of the parties, and especially in the Bolshevik tradition, the violent overthrow of a bourgeois government by the proletariat, or at the very least the violent overthrow of a reactionary government by popular, progressive forces ...

In any case, as we now see clearly, the results have been extraordinarily mixed. The Mexican Revolution does not seem today to have had very revolutionary results. And the Chinese? The Russian revolutionaries are now an historical memory, and, at the moment, not one very honored in Russia. The first question that it seems reasonable to ask, therefore, is whether the so-called revolutionary trajectory has indeed been more or less efficacious than the reform trajectory has been. Of course, we can do the same skeptical review of the accomplishments of social-democratic reform. How fundamentally was the Labour Party able to transform Great Britain? Or even the Swedish Social-Democratic Party? In the 1990s when almost everyone from China to Sweden to Mexico

is talking the language of the "market," one may wonder legitimately whether 150 to 200 years of revolutionary tradition have paid off.

One may wonder even more how great has been the distinction between revolutionary and reformist activity. Particular parties, particular social movements, and particular complexes of social activity perceived as a long and large "revolutionary" event can all be described (probably without exception) as the locus of shifting tactics, such that they looked revolutionary (or insurrectionary, or radical, or transformatory) at some points in time and distinctly less so at others.

Real-existing revolutionary leaders have always tried to steer a middle course, often in zigzag form, between "selling out" at one end and "adventurism" on the other. Of course, one person's "adventurism" has been another's "true revolutionary commitment." One person's "sellout" has been another's "one step backward, two steps forward."

It is perhaps time to stop throwing stones at one another and take a sober look at the objective constraints on left political activity over the past two centuries throughout the world, and the degree of strength of the underground pressure for transformation. Let us start with the givens. We live in a capitalist world-system that is deeply inegalitarian and oppressive. It has also been successful in expanding world production, which has therefore placed considerable economic strength in the hands of those who are the chief beneficiaries of the world-system. We may assume that those who benefit wish to maintain the system more or less as it is, and will invest considerable political energy in maintaining the status quo. Can we assume that those who do not benefit wish with equal fervor to transform it? No we cannot, for several reasons: ignorance, fear, and apathy. Furthermore, individual upward mobility provides an outlet for a clever minority of the oppressed. In addition, the nonbeneficiaries are weaker—economically and militarily—than the beneficiaries ...

Having said this, the sum total [of what has been achieved] is very disappointing given the incredible social energy that was put into revolutionary activity in the twentieth (and nineteenth) centuries. I share the sense of the revolutionaries of 1968 that the





Old Left in all its versions had become by that point in time "part of the problem." Since then, however, the world Left has moved on. The worldwide revolution of 1968 has had an immense impact on forces everywhere that think of themselves as antisystemic. Our mode of analysis reveals six major consequences, each of which I wish to state in a restrained way.

1. The two-step strategy—first take state power, then transform society—has moved from the status of self-evident truth (for most persons) to the status of doubtful proposition.

2. The organizational assumption that political activity in each state would be most efficacious if channeled through a single cohesive party is no longer widely accepted.

3. The concept that the only conflict within capitalism that is fundamental is the conflict between capital and labor—and that other conflicts based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc are all secondary, derived, or atavistic—no longer has wide credence.

4. The idea that democracy is a bourgeois concept that blocks revolutionary activity has been giving way to an idea that democracy may be a profoundly anticapitalist and revolutionary idea.

5. The idea that an increase in productivity is the essential pre-requisite of socialist construction has been replaced by a concern with the consequences of productivism in terms of ecology, the quality of life, and the consequent commodification of everything.

6. The faith in science as the foundation stone of the construction of utopia has given way to a skepticism about classical science and popular scientism, in favor of a willingness to think in terms of a more complex relationship between determinism and free will, order and chaos. Progress is no longer self-evident.

None of these six revisions of our premises is totally new. But the revolution of 1968, by shaking the legitimacy of the Old Left, has transformed the doubts held by a small handful of persons into a far more widespread revisionism, a veritable "cultural revolution." Each of these six revisions of premises is complex and could be elaborated at length. I cannot do that here. I can only address the implications of these revisions for antisystemic political activity, particularly for the strategy and tactics of "revolution".

The first and most fundamental implication is that "revolution"—as the word was used in Marxist-Leninist movements—is no longer a viable concept. It has no meaning, at least no meaning now. "Revolution" was supposed to describe an activity by a party, its struggle to achieve state power, its role as the standard-bearer of labor in the capital-labor struggle, its scorn for democracy as mere "bourgeois rights," its dedication to increased productivity, its self-description as scientific. Do parties meeting this description and attracting significant support still exist? I don't see very many, if any.

What we see in their place are two things. The first are Old Left parties, often with changed names, struggling to survive electorally on the basis of eclectic centrist programs about which they don't seem to feel very strongly, heirs of a vague sentiment for social justice ... The second is the ever-evolving panoply of parties and movements who are the diluted heirs of the revolution



of 1968: Green parties, feminist movements, movements of oppressed ethnic and racial so-called minorities, gay and lesbian movements, and what might be called base community movements ...

As we come into the 1990s, we observe two enormous political dilemmas for the world's antisystemic movements.

First, the new antisystemic movements that emerged out of the revolution of 1968 were quite successful in their attack on the premises that undergirded the Old Left, but they have floundered ever since in their quest for an alternative strategy. Is state power still relevant, or not? What could be the basis of any lasting alliance between movements? As time goes on, the answers seem increasingly similar to those of the now highly eclectic Old Left movements.

Secondly, the 1990s are seeing the spread of movements, launched in the 1980s, which are racist and populist. But quite often they use themes and assume tonalities that overlap partially with what the new antisystemic movements do. There is enormous risk of political confusion of multiple types.

So here we are: tired and eclectic shells of Old Left parties; no viable concept of "a revolution;" new antisystemic movements that are vigorous but with no clear strategic vision; and new racist or populist movements of growing strength. Amidst all this, the besieged defenders of the existing capitalist world-system are by no means disarmed and are pursuing a policy of the flexible postponement of contradictions, waiting as they are for the moment when they can pursue a radical transformation of their own, away from a capitalist mode of production to some new but equally unequalitarian, undemocratic world-system.

It is time long past when we need to define with some clarity an alternative strategy to the defunct one of "revolution." I think that such redefinition is a collective worldwide task. I can only suggest here a few lines of action that might be elements of such a strategy, but which do not add up to a total strategy.

1. The first is a return to a traditional tactic. Everywhere, in every workplace, we should push for more, that is—that more of the surplus value be retained by the working class. This once seemed so obvious, but it came to be neglected for a variety of reasons: the parties' fear of trade unionism and economism; protectionist tactics of workers in high-wage areas; movement dominated state structures acting with the logic of employers. Simultaneously, we must press for the full internalization of costs by every enterprise. Local-level constant pressure for such internalization and for more—more in Detroit, more in Gdansk, more in São Paulo, more in Fiji—can deeply shake the patterns of accumulation of capital.

2. Second, everywhere in every political structure at every level, more democracy, that is, more popular participation and more open decision making. Again, once thought obvious, this has been restrained by Left movements' deep distrust of mass psychology, the origin of their vanguardism. Perhaps this was legitimate in the nineteenth century, but a transformation to a better world-system will not be possible without genuine, deeply motivated popular support, which has to be created and developed





through more democracy now.

3. Third, the world Left has to come to terms with its dilemma concerning universalism versus particularism. The Napoleonic imperial universalism affected by the Old Left has no merit. But an endless glorification of smaller and smaller particularisms has none either. We need to search for a way of constructing a new universalism that is based on a foundation of countless groups and not on the mythical atomic individual. But this requires a kind of global social liberalism that we are reluctant to accept. We need thus to give operational meaning (and not mere puffery) to Senghor's "come together in order to give and to receive." It should be tried at countless local levels.

4. Fourth, we need to think of state power as a tactic, utilizing it whenever we can and for whatever immediate needs, without investing in it or strengthening it. Above all, we must shun managing the system, at any level. We must cease to be terrified of the political breakdown of the system.

Will this transform the system? I do not know. I see it as a strategy of "overloading" the system by taking the ideological

slogans of liberalism seriously, something never intended by the liberals. What could overload the system more than the free movement of people, for example? And, along with overloading the system, it is a strategy of "preserving our options," of moving toward better things immediately, of leaving the total responsibility of managing the existing world-system to its beneficiaries, of concentrating on creating a new sociality at the local and world levels.

We must, in short, become practical, consequential, constant workers in the vineyard, discussing our utopias, and pushing forward. As the present world-system crashes down upon us in the next fifty years, we must have a substantive alternative to offer that is a collective creation. Only then will we have a chance of obtaining a Gramscian hegemony in world civil society, and thereby a chance of winning the struggle against those who are seeking to change everything in order that nothing change.

Reprinted (in edited form) from **Immanuel Wallerstein**, *After Liberalism*, New York 1995.

## Reclaiming May Day

For those of us schooled in the U.S., the International Workers holiday known as May Day has little or no significance in our lives. Many people think it has something to do with the change of seasons and the ancient festivals celebrating nature and the season of fertility and rebirth. To others it brings to mind giant military parades past the Kremlin and the various dictators and bureaucrats that ruled the Marxist states over the years.

In 1886, a new labor organization was forming as the national centre of the emerging labor movement; it was called the American Federation of Labor. The organization adopted the following to the preamble of its constitution: "A struggle is going on in the nations of the world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the toiling millions of all nations if not combined for mutual protection and benefit."

Seeing class struggle and the strike as its most powerful weapons the AFofL sought to use the demand for an eight hour work day as a means of organizing the working people of the country into a fighting force. At its convention in 1884 it resolved that all labor should come together on May 1, 1886 to demand the establishment of the eight hour work day.

Despite the fierce resistance of the industrialists, monopolists and the press, the eight hour work day was supported by most working people.

In Chicago two anarchist labor organizers worked feverishly to convince the unions to support the May 1 action. In the months leading up to the event Albert Parsons and August Spies addressed crowds of many thousands of working people, to favour the cause. In the process they made themselves the targets of the newspapers that had been calling for a "communist carcass for every lamp post," in their headlines and editorial pages.

On the morning of May 1, 1886 a crowd of some 80,000 people filled the streets of the city of Chicago ready to march for the eight-hour day. Across the nation 340,000 had not gone to work, about 100,000 of them were on strike for the eight hour day. In the back streets and alleys and on the roofs an army had assembled, made up of the police, Pinkertons, militia, national guard and private military companies. All fully armed and ready to put down what

they thought would be a workers insurrection along the lines of the Paris Commune.

All this preparation for violence was a waste of time; the parade took place without any trouble. After a final speech by Spies, festivities were over and May 1 came to a close.

Two days later on Monday the strike was spreading, and some workers were gaining the eight hour day. The police no doubt frustrated by the lack of action on May 1 found some relief by clubbing the locked out workers at the McCormick Harvester Company as they escorted scabs into the plant. At the end of the workday a large crowd of these workers were assembled outside the plant waiting for the scabs to come out. The police charged them with their guns drawn. The workers began to flee and the police opened fire shooting them in the back as they ran and killing six. Outraged by this act of barbarity, which he had witnessed, Spies organized a protest against police violence to be held the next day at Haymarket Square.

The crowd for the demonstration was larger than expected and included the mayor of the city. After hearing Parsons declare at the beginning of his speech, "I am not here for the purpose of inciting anybody," he stopped at the near-by police station and informed the police captain John "Clubber" Bonfield, that the meeting was peaceful and he should dismiss the police that had been mobilized for the event.

Despite the mayor's instructions the police marched on the crowd, which was disbanding because of a storm that was brewing. As Bonfield demanded the peaceful assembly disperse peacefully someone threw a bomb. One officer was killed outright and seven others were fatally wounded in the chaos that ensued as the police fired their weapons indiscriminately and clubbed anyone within reach.

In the middle of a virtual police reign of terror where the foreign born and union leaders were randomly arrested and tortured in cities across the country, homes were invaded and doors broken in, and the presses of foreign newspapers were smashed, eight men were indicted. All avowed anarchists, Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden Michael Schwab, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Louis Lingg, and Oscar Neebe would stand trial for

**Continued on page 34**





# Different Thoughts

About a year ago I spent a lot of time and effort trying to convince people that the right thing to do was network organising. I was very successful in convincing some people of this. Or maybe I was successful in finding some other people who liked network organising.

We discussed network organising a lot, and eventually it became policy of *Rank and File News* to set up an organizing centre in Melbourne. Then we spent much time talking and writing and looking for places, and we were actually going to set up a centre. But we didn't. Others have done it, in Melbourne and elsewhere, but we didn't. We had a big argument instead, and I resigned from the organizing centre. That was at the end of last year.

I think network organising has some strengths. These strengths allow this tendency, which some people call Autonomist to be very relevant to many people who want to organise against capitalism in many different countries. Much of network organising involves building united front actions, and helping to build political alliances which promote those actions. This is a serious improvement on the practice of many socialist organisations that refuse to work with members of different tendencies. But network organising has some very serious flaws. In my opinion these flaws squander the revolutionary potential of the work of the tendency.

## One: Network organising is politically confused

Many of the Autonomist intellectuals write books which are incomprehensible to me. Toni Negri in particular, but others too. I used to think that being incomprehensible was a sign of intelligence, but now I am not so sure. Much of the theory promoted by these intellectuals is an attempt to say that capitalism has changed so much that we have to change all our thinking about class, the state, exploitation, work and so on. This is largely based on an analysis of the new production processes based on information industries, contracting and sub-contracting and hidden economies. This analysis sometimes calls modern capitalism post-fordism. Young activists are encouraged to think and talk in this way, supporting theories of social analysis which are new and pretty ways to say that class is not central any more. But this new and pretty analysis is wrong. Capitalism still rules, and monopoly capitalism still rules.

Exploitation is now more sophisticated and more intense and more pervasive, so all intellectual work and most service work is now organised according to the priorities of the profit system, just as manual labour has been for a long time. Intellectual work is now a big part of the total labour extracted from the proletariat, but that doesn't mean the class system is gone.

Having developed new theories network organising promotes

new methods of organising. Organising centres are one method. They were developed in Italy and Germany when finding spaces to meet was an issue, and when social democratic, euro-communist and stalinist organisations were excluding radicals from social movements and from political and industrial struggles. Organising centres (also called social centres) are certainly significant in Europe. But in Australia today space is not a major issue, and the social democrats and the stalinists are unable to exclude us from organising. Yet organising centres are still promoted as the first step in organising, and work in already existing structures and with other organisations and tendencies is neglected.

Other methods of organising are not so new, but they are discussed in different ways to make them appear new. The Zapatistas are considered part of network organising. They talk about neo-liberalism, instead of capitalism or imperialism, and they describe solidarity with their indigenous national liberation struggle as building networks of communication and struggle. This way of defining the struggle may or may not be helpful to the Zapatistas and to workers in Chiapas. But it does protect the Zapatistas from criticism within the tendency. The accommodation with the Mexican state which occurs in many forms, from carrying Mexican flags at Zapatista demonstrations, to rejection of the notion of taking state power, is described as fresh and clever radical politics, rather than the avoiding of revolutionary solutions to the crisis.

Overall network organising promotes organisation without much discussion of political program. This helps in getting many people together for an action, but it does not help in deciding what unites us for long term objectives. It does not make it easy to collectively decide our priorities, to identify who may be our allies, and who may become our enemies.

## Two: Network organising promotes unaccountable leaders

In Italy there are many organising centres. These are mainly squatted buildings, and they promote activities on the basis of agreement with an action, not on the basis of prior agreement with a political program. This allows many activists to come together, sometimes from different tendencies, and work together to develop demonstrations and other radical actions. But in fact all organising centres are managed by smaller groups of long term activists, who have a political agreement within their group to run the centre. They are the people who give the centre the character it has between campaigns. In practice the long term activists do a lot of work and have a lot of power. They are the leadership of the centre, but they are not elected by the activists who use the centre. This allows



many distortions in the politics of organising centres, as some policies are set by the long term activists, but can never be discussed by the majority of the activists, who only participate in the centre for a campaign or come in for a concert.

This is very apparent in most Italian centres with their ban on heroin. This ban may or may not be endorsed by most activists, but it has the consequence of excluding some of the most marginalised and oppressed workers from involvement in the centres, including many illegal immigrant workers, because they use, or because they sell heroin.

Unrepresentative leadership can become a bigger problem over time. In India there is an organisation called Kommunist Kranti Collectivities. They produced a document titled the Ballad Against Work, which many activists thought brilliant. It describes the way capitalism attacks the life of all workers, from factory workers to managers and supervisors. Collectivities developed a theory of the daily struggle of workers while at work, to fight the constant pressures of management. They called this "small steps". This was very important theoretical work.

However since then Collectivities has developed a political program that defines hierarchies as the single political problem faced by workers. And Collectivities don't discriminate between the hierarchy of workers' industrial or political organisation and the hierarchy of the capitalist enterprise or the capitalist state. This program has been developed to the extent of stating that strikes and demonstrations are always against the interests of workers, as these involve setting up leaderships and hierarchies, which will invariably produce defeats. They extended this to the point of announcing that they prefer individual uncoordinated workers' action rather than mass action. These positions are very foolish and dangerous for any organisation in the workers movement. They can be used to promote scabbing by individuals to break strikes. It is really sad to see Collectivities quoted approvingly by many people in Autonomist organisations because of their statements against hierarchies and leadership. Collectivities themselves act as a political leadership, promoting only their own dangerous perspective against organised mass action to all workers who will listen.

### Three: Network organising is not internationalist

During the nineties the Italian school occupations and the French movement of the unemployed were very large campaigns with a great deal of involvement by Autonomists. But both failed to cross national borders. For a tendency that talks so much in internationalist terms, network organising fails to deliver precisely when the social situation heats up dramatically. Local issues are promoted, but general programs to advance the interests of the whole class are not developed. So local organisations develop united front actions with more and more local organisations until there is a national movement. But all the local organisations develop their positions against the opposition of a capitalist state, not against capitalism in general. So all their statements are about particular local issues, particular laws, particular rates of pay. These will not automatically be understood over the border. To internationalise campaigns it is necessary to have some forward planning, which involves some level of international discussion and organisation, not simply networks of communication and struggle. Network organising has proven unable to deal with the issue of the oppression of women in Afghanistan, or with the wars in Rwanda and in the Balkans. I know that the other tendencies fail just as completely in dealing with these immediate issues, but it is important to realise that network organising is not ahead of the rest in theory or in practice.

STRIKE THE



WAR MACHINE

### Four: Network organising is sectarian

Sectarian means promoting a sect rather than the interests of the class. Many socialist organisations behave like this. But Autonomists do this too. In Italy the social centres have promoted new little rank and file controlled unions often called Cobas. This was based on an analysis of the main union federations, including the communist party aligned CGIL as structures that were part of the capitalist state. This has meant abandoning the fight for any kind of influence in the main union federations, and leaving millions of workers to be influenced only by social democrat and euro-communist activists and officials. The small Cobas have now grown big, and they are faced with having to deal with all the issues that the main federations confront from national coverage to contracts. And yet they are still promoting a policy of seeing the Cobas unions as genuine worker organisations and the main federations as part of the state. This neatly eliminates the possibility of working together against the capitalists and the state. Of course it is difficult to work with bureaucratic and often corrupt unions. But it is necessary to recognise that most workers join union to defend basic conditions, and the union to join is for most workers the one which is already there, where they work. Only a minority of workers will join a union on the basis of political program, and these workers will be the activists who will organise in any union, even in a very bureaucratic union.

I spent a long time reading Autonomist papers and having discussions on these issues. Sometimes I feel that I wasted some of that time. But at other times I think that if I had not spent that time discussing these politics, I would be unable to organise some useful campaigns now. Overall I don't regret the effort I put into network organising. I do find myself very ambivalent about my attitude to activists in the tendency. I don't want to call them obstacles to the advancement of working class interests. Only a few months ago I held the same positions, and I held those positions honestly. But I now think those positions are detrimental to the workers' movement. I was not convinced of this just by arguments. I was convinced by arguments and by the results of our attempts to put network organising into practice.

I have written these notes to give a brief report to readers who have been following the discussions on network organising and organising centres in the pages of *Rank and File News*. I hope they may be useful as we continue discussing and planning the work ahead.

Manrico Moro



# Same Old Thoughts



**M**y first reaction in reading 'Different Thoughts' was one of surprise. Not because the document was so critical of autonomist politics, since I have always understood its author to be so, but rather because there were so many misrepresentations within it. Given the constraints of time, space, and readers' patience, I'm going to concentrate on the most glaring bloopers, and offer some pointers to other material for those who are interested.

**Accusation: autonomist politics holds that 'class is not central anymore'. Wrong.**

Like most of the political tendencies familiar to readers of *Rank & File News* - trotskyism, anarchism, maoism - autonomist marxism is comprised of a range of political currents, often in sharp disagreement about tactics and strategy. Perhaps the only thing upon which all currents of autonomist marxism do agree upon, though, is the centrality of class. If anything, the tendency has been accused of obsessing about class composition as the alpha and omega of revolutionary politics:

By 'political recomposition' we mean the level of unity and homogeneity that the working class reaches during a cycle of struggle in the process of going from one composition to another. Essentially, it involves the overthrow of capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between different sectors of the class, and an expansion of the boundaries of what the 'working class' comes to include.(1)

Then there is Toni Negri, one of the better known autonomist theorists. Now, I am not a great fan of Negri's work, and I think that some of his arguments about recent developments in capitalism are, to put it diplomatically, debatable. But that is precisely the point: these issues are subject to lively debate and criticism amongst autonomist marxists (and not only them).(2) At the same time, even his sharpest critics would acknowledge that for Negri, we continue to live in a capitalist society characterised by a deepening and extension of class domination. But don't take my word for it: his writings, and those of other autonomist marxists (e.g. Harry Cleaver, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, the Midnight Notes collective) are not too difficult to find. Some are even readable.

**Autonomist politics 'promote unaccountable leaders'. Yes, sometimes, but not (thankfully) always.**

As Manrico points out, most Italian social centres are illegally

squatted. As a consequence, they 'belong' to those who are prepared to maintain and defend them against eviction. This already implies some separation between those who identify strongly with each centre, and those who occasionally frequent them to hear a band or drink beer and smoke dope. Most commonly, the centres are run by weekly assemblies of activists, a form of organising which, in rejecting the norms of democratic centralism, can run the risk of ceding power to an informal clique. Not all centres, however, fall into the 'tyranny of structurelessness'; thankfully, the promotion of 'unaccountable leaders' is a little less common amongst left libertarians than their leninist rivals. As members of the Forte Prenestino centre in Rome have put it,

Many people are convinced that the Forte is run by just a handful of people, a management committee that makes decisions in the name of and on behalf of everyone else. Such people simply can't conceive—whether for reasons of ideology or cynicism—that a micro-society of equal persons can survive and prosper (3)

As for Manrico's example of heroin use: heroin had a devastating impact upon the Italian revolutionary left in the late seventies, even more so than the mass arrests which left 4,000 comrades in prison. Not surprisingly, the social centres movement which emerged soon after saw heroin first and foremost as a weapon directed against working class self-organisation. While much of their initial energy went into producing counter-information on the heroin industry and into isolating (by force if necessary) those who dealt in the drug, they did not ostracise those who used it:

The social centres of the early eighties . . . imposed a principle as simple as it was effective: if you're high, you can't come into the social centre. But if you come back tomorrow and you aren't high, you can come in. You had to make a choice: either the social centre, or heroin. Because choosing the social centre also means choosing 'a project, a new social sphere in which to establish relations of friendship, vital universes, subjectivity'.(4)

Which raises another point: few if any of the Italian squats call themselves 'organising centres', in part because they want to do so much more than political campaigning in the narrow sense of the term. Or as members of Forte Prenestino have put it, they seek to challenge 'the classic schizophrenia between political activity and life'.

'Different Thoughts' also has a few things to say about the Indian group KK/Collectivities, and in particular about its most





From the YWCA exhibition *WOMAN*, 1973

recent text. KK are not autonomists, so here it is a case of guilt by association, since KK, we are told, 'prefer individual uncoordinated workers' action rather than mass action'. Certainly it's true that the Indian group criticises what they call 'big, mass, spectacular movements', since these remove the direction of struggle from those workers involved; the specific instances they cite make instructive reading. They enter more dubious ground when they reject open strike action because of this risk of manipulation. But does this lead KK to argue that only as individuals can we challenge capital and the state? Strange, then, that they conclude their article (which is available on the WWW, and in the latest issue of *Collective Action Notes*) as follows:

Lest we be misunderstood, we would like to make it clear that we are not for small steps per se but our concern, rather, is for self-activity. Self-activity in terms of routine resistances and steps of change by wage-workers at large on a sustained, extended and expansive scale, encompassing a multifaceted global reality.(5)

In reflecting upon their considerable industrial experience, KK's latest offering may well throw the baby out with the bathwater (to use one of Negri's favourite phrases). But calling them names ('dangerous') is no substitute for debate: why not commission a critique and then ask them to respond, as happened in *Collective Action Notes*?

**Autonomist politics 'is not internationalist'. Wrong.**

'Different Thoughts' criticises autonomists because recent mass struggles in Italy and France 'failed to cross national borders'. It's a silly comment, really: which revolutionary current anywhere has

such influence at present? In fact, as Manrico concedes, no political tendency has yet been able to move beyond 'networks of communication and struggle'. But his accusation also ignores a number of facts:

- a) forms of struggle in workplaces, communities and schools are increasingly circulating between Italy, France, and a number of other European states, such as Spain and Germany;
- b) concerted efforts continue to be made for continent-wide mobilisations.

Two years ago, 3,000 Italian activists hijacked a train to take them to a big (50,000) EU-wide rally in Amsterdam against cutbacks to public spending.(6) On the last weekend in March 1999, another large Italian contingent was only prevented from reaching to Paris via rail for an EU-wide rally against immigration laws by the temporary suspension of the Schengen agreement, enforced by the mobilisation of hundreds of French police at the border town of Mentone. Then there was the conference of 1,500 activists in Venice late in 1997 which I was lucky enough to attend: not only was a delegation present from Chiapas, but I met comrades from France, Belgium, Poland, and Spain. In the middle of the year, hundreds of Indian farmer activists will be touring Europe: in Italy they will be hosted by social centres and radical Christian groups.(7) None of these actions could take place without 'some forward planning' and 'some level of international discussion and organisation'; all are well-documented, with news and updates easily available via the WWW and e-mail news lists such as a-infos.(8)

**Autonomist politics 'is sectarian'. Depends what you mean, doesn't it?**



One person's sectarianism is another person's principled stance: as an insult it doesn't take us very far. Let's look at the Italian COBAS and alternative unions, since 'Different Thoughts' refers to them in this context. The COBAS began in the late eighties amongst public sector employees (primarily railway workers and teachers) fed up with unions that gave away conditions through national contracts, whilst denying members the right to ratify such agreements. The local autonomist movement—then far from recovered after the repression of a decade before—was understandably enthusiastic about a militant mass movement that organised outside and against the official unions, and as Manrico says, the alternative unions have grown considerably since then, now counting their membership in the tens of thousands (the CUB alone claims 100,000 members). But reading his account you wouldn't know that the formation of such breakaway bodies has often involved making virtue of necessity, after militants were expelled from the official unions. Or that outside the Veneto region, autonomists have little influence within the movement: about as much influence as the rest of the far left, nearly all of which is active in the COBAS and alternative unions as well. Let alone that the political force with most weight within the COBAS is in fact Rifondazione Comunista, a party which could be called many things, but hardly 'autonomist'.

It's true that the alternative union movement in Italy currently finds itself in an impasse, although not necessarily for the reasons suggested by 'Different Thoughts'. But since *Rank & File News* is now in contact with a journal which operates within the ambits of Italian alternative unionism, why not solicit an article or interview from *di Base*? I have no doubt that its editors would more than willing to discuss the limits of their national experience, and that local readers would be fascinated with their account.

### Conclusion

None of what I've written is to suggest that autonomist politics is

above criticism, nor that it is inherently superior to other tendencies committed to working class self-emancipation. Indeed, much that is positive can be learned from the experiences and writings of syndicalists (anarcho- and otherwise), council communists, socialist feminists, anarchists et al. More to the point, much can be learned by all of us from the struggles around us, if only we are prepared to listen. Measuring the worth of every political tendency against the practical tasks at hand is an ongoing and necessary task: it's just a pity that 'Different Thoughts' wastes most of its ammunition on straw targets.

**Steve Wright**

### Notes

- 1 See the aut-op-sy web page - [lists.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/aut\\_html](http://lists.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/aut_html). Also useful is Massimo De Angelis' 1993 interview with Harry Cleaver, [www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3843/cleaver.html](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3843/cleaver.html)
- 2 One survey is my 1995 article 'Confronting the Crisis of Fordism: The Italian Debates', [services.csi.it/~chaos/steve.htm](http://services.csi.it/~chaos/steve.htm)
- 3 See my 1995 article 'Living in the Heart of the Beast: Italy's Social Centres', [www.ainfos.ca/A-Infos96/6/0007.html](http://www.ainfos.ca/A-Infos96/6/0007.html)
- 4 Alba Solaro (1992) 'Il cerchio e la saetta: Centri Sociali occupati in Italia' in Carlo Branzaglia et al. *Posse italiane. Centri sociali, underground musicale e cultura giovanile degli anni '90 in Italia*. Florence: Tosca, p.32.
- 5 KK/Collectivities (1998) 'Wage Workers Self-Activity', [www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/leadry.htm](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/leadry.htm)
- 6 See 'The Europe of Deportation, Jun 17', [gopher://lists.village.Virginia.EDU:70/0R453641-474662-/pubs/listservs/spoons/aut-op-sy.archive/aut-op-sy\\_1997/aut-op-sy.9706](http://lists.village.Virginia.EDU:70/0R453641-474662-/pubs/listservs/spoons/aut-op-sy.archive/aut-op-sy_1997/aut-op-sy.9706)
- 7 See 'Inter Continental Caravan', [www.dsl.nl/icc/ICC-en/ICCframe-en.htm](http://www.dsl.nl/icc/ICC-en/ICCframe-en.htm)
- 8 A-infos can be found at [www.tao.ca/ainfos/](http://www.tao.ca/ainfos/) or [www.ainfos.ca/](http://www.ainfos.ca/)

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conspiracy to murder Mathias J. Degan, the police officer that was slain when the bomb was thrown at the Haymarket.

Convicted by a packed jury, perjured testimony, a judge determined to hang, the verdict was a mere formality. Oscar Neebe received fifteen years, all the others were sentenced to death. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to examine the case and the execution date was set for November 11, 1887.

The day before the execution Governor Oglesby commuted the death sentences of Fielden and Schwab. The night before the executions Louis Lingg committed suicide using a dynamite cartridge which he placed in his mouth and lit the fuse. On November 11, 1887 Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engles stood on the gallows. The trap doors were sprung and labor's greatest martyrs were history.

In 1888 the American Federation of Labor set May 1, 1889 as the day of action for the eight-hour day. The following year in Paris the newly formed International Association of Working People, voted to support the eight hour day struggle and set May 1st 1890 to show their support. On that day workers all over Europe and America demonstrated by holding meetings and parades to support the eight-hour workday. Thus was born the International May Day, celebrated all over the world by working people to this day.

On June 26, 1893, the Governor of the state of Illinois, John Peter Atgeld, granted an unconditional pardon to Fielden, Schwab and Neebe because they had been wrongfully convicted and were

innocent.

This Saturday is May Day. Talk to your friends about having a four-hour workday without any reduction in pay. It would be a great way to start to redistribute some of the wealth. Talk to your friends about the need for strong labor organizations that can resist the corporations, which threaten to destroy the entire planet in their greed driven search for profit.

Let's reclaim May Day for all working people and let us not forget the struggle and sacrifice of our labor heroes  
HAPPY MAY DAY!!

**Jay Brophy**

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# Anti-fascist?

*Rank and File News* claims to be an anti-fascist paper, and it has links with an organisation, Campaign Against the Nazis, which tries to be almost a vanguard of anti-fascism. Yet its first attempt to put into theoretical form its opposition to fascism is ambiguous to say the least.

I am referring to Steve Wright's article in *Rank and File News* 34, "Buy now, pay later". Wright's central thesis about fascism and right wing reaction is a quotation from someone else—"the late Primo Moroni". Moroni, describing the Italian Lega Nord, is quoted as saying that the new party / movement "gives pride of place to the values of professionalism, efficiency, the family, and the ideology of work, categories that for a long time were also the legacy of the left and the organised labour movement". Wright glosses the quotation from Moroni by declaring Moroni "could equally be describing One Nation". It is a curious form of attack on One Nation that identifies its values with those of "the left and the organised labour movement". One could interpret this, indeed, as support for One Nation. It will be news to many *Rank and File News* readers that "the left and the organised labour movement" had any kind of view of the family remotely resembling One Nation's. Wright knows the untruth of this assertion, since in the immediately preceding paragraph he mentions Wilhelm Reich.

And identity of views on the "ideology of work"? Not even the worst Trotskyist and Maoist groups have endorsed Hanson's call for military training for the young unemployed. But perhaps we should take the word "ideology" as indicating something more abstract—an agreement, say, on the slogan that once decorated the gates of Dachau, *Arbecht macht Frei*? We know, as Wright knows, that in that particular case, work led, not to freedom, but to death. But perhaps that is part of the ideology of what Wright calls the left that he is for good reason reticent about. This is not the time and place to go into a discussion of what Marx's position on labour actually was. Quite apart from the fatuity of discussing such a subject with anyone who supports a "labour movement" with Hanson's "values", Wright's refusal to "dust off the old books" is intended as an escape from real debate about the intellectual inheritance so arbitrarily repudiated. His ideas certainly have far more in common with August Babel (whom he quotes) than with Karl Marx.

Nor does the trade union movement or the left value "professionalism"—a value of a social group outside of, or on the extreme white collar fringes of, the labour movement. It is true that Lenin, in *What is to be done?* idealised the "professional revolutionary", and perhaps what is intended is an equation of Leninism and ultra-rightism. Such an equation might well be justified, especially if we remember the 1918 bolshevik-proclaimed Red Terror against the workers' movement, but Wright appears to be identifying with professionalism (after all, he is an academic) rather than repudiating it. In any case a minor question of factual accuracy arises: can One Nation in any sense be called a "professional" political organisation? Its record is surely one of bungling amateurism. Or does Wright admire not only its "ideology of work" but also its political functioning?

One might ask a further question, whether there is anything in common between the Lega Nord and One Nation, apart from their appearance on the spectrum of extreme right parties? The Lega Nord argues for the secession of Northern Italy from Italy proper, and is led by bourgeois politicians. One Nation, as its name implies,

opposes secessionism like the plague, inventing black secessionism when it cannot document it, and is a classical lower middle class party.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Wright concludes his piece by opposing anti-fascist rallies such as those at Northcote and arguing for "communication" between the "radical left" and One Nation, on the basis of a "justified hatred of politicians". No thanks—my hatred of politicians is justified by their racism, not their anti-racism. And in spite of the half paragraph politely criticising bourgeois anti-fascism, the fact remains that economic neo-liberalism must and can only generate fascism, both inside and outside neo-liberalism itself. The view of Asian workers as competing with Australians especially on wages, is an economic rationalist mantra taken over and given a racist content by One Nation. This political move does not require undue intelligence; It has been a tradition of petty-bourgeois Australian politics from the high point of the White Australia movement in the eighteen-nineties.

In the present political conjuncture, critiques of One Nation from the right lead inexorably to forms of social fascism—the creation of mystiques of an invincible state somehow able to overcome any superior economic force. Critiques of neo-liberalism from the left would involve counterposition of new, non-statist forms of class democracy to neo-liberalism—an emphasis totally absent, and predictably so, from writers with politics such as Wright's. The politically expropriated poor, who Martin Thomas refers to in his companion article to Wright's are not, as he claims, One Nation supporters, but the demonstrators outside One Nation meetings, the people whom Howard has labelled "worse than One Nation". They are opposing both neo-liberalism and Hansonism from the left.

The project of a new White Australia in a country, which after Israel, has the highest immigrant population in the world, should be risible. The example of Israel, with its entrenched Jewish / Arab divisions, as well as those between Western and Sephardic Jews, shows that a high migrant population is no prophylactic against racism. But in Israel the minority, threatened by racism, is organised. The people whom One Nation would exclude from citizenship—migrants, Aborigines, people on social security (except age pensioners), a sizeable proportion of the young, people with criminal records—are probably a majority of Australians, not a minority as in Israel, and they are not organised. They are also groups whose problems the left has traditionally failed to recognise, and has ignored. The left's failure of nerve has helped the extreme right in the past and will help it even more if it continues. It is with One Nation's poorest potential victims, not its sympathisers, that left must communicate urgently.

Owen Gager



# 21st century - maybe

The conference "Anarcho-Syndicalism into the 21st Century" (1) was held in Melbourne for three days over Easter this year and was both encouraging and disappointing. I went along with very low expectations, based on my previous contact with anarcho-syndicalist groups in Australia, and found that what I saw was far better than I had anticipated—though still considerably short of what it should have been. While I couldn't attend the whole conference, reports from people who attended other sessions fit my interpretation.

There were sessions on aspects of the history of anarcho-syndicalism in Australia, current experiences of organising in the workplace, using the Internet, gender, indigenous perspectives and future possibilities, as well as a few others. Most of the sessions I attended were both interesting and structured to enable substantial participation from the people attending. Although there were only 25-30 participants, this probably met the organisers' expectations because the conference was aimed at anarcho-syndicalist activists, for reasons which will be discussed later.

Possibly the best session I attended was the IWW (2) history workshop, where the presenter knew the basics and had some little-known pieces to add, while the participants had, between themselves, a lot more to contribute. Some of the information offered seemed to have escaped the attention of academics publishing in the field. Virtually everyone finished the discussion knowing a fair bit more about the IWW in Australia than they did beforehand.

Probably the worst session I saw was the one on Anarcho-Syndicalism within the Perspectives of Anarchism, which was overly abstract and too long to allow useful discussion. The session on Women and Work was notable. It led to excellent discussion on experiences of casual work and of sexual harassment, and extended to include unwaged work as well. Some comrades from Perth gave a talk on Organising and Inclusivity, which demonstrated the advantages of the inclusive approach they have adopted. The story of their unexpected success in the West Australian campaign to defend workers' compensation was inspiring. Finally, the session on aboriginal law, presented by an elder of the Gunnai people, was greatly informative and led to much fruitful discussion.

Overall, the tone of discussion in the conference sessions was both reasoned and co-operative. This was a pleasant surprise to me. Discussions with participants out of session revealed a strong desire to approach issues constructively instead of engaging in ideological posturing. It is something which bodes well for the future.

Two things which did not bode well for the future must, however, be mentioned. The gender issue is one which anarcho-syndicalists in Australia have yet to tackle successfully. At the conference, not only were women greatly under-represented amongst presenters of the sessions, the sessions they did present were often marginalised by being run concurrently with other ones or scheduled at unattractive times (like first thing Sunday morning). Further, women were over-represented amongst the people doing support work (e.g. kitchen, organising, etc). The organisers were aware of these issues and had made some efforts to address them, but a lot more work needs to be done to get up to standard. It's a question of priorities.

The other problem was an ugly incident of political censorship, where activists from a small Marxist group were ejected from the conference within minutes of their arrival. They were not being

disruptive and were merely engaging in quiet conversation which involved the display of their political material. The aggressive stance of the conference representative involved made it impossible to get to the bottom of the supposed prohibition of political literature by the organisation providing the venue. The prohibition could not have been total, however, because three anarchist literature stalls operated in a convenient room for the whole conference.

The exclusion of non-anarchist tendencies from anarchist functions is practiced by much of the anarchist movement in Melbourne and is to be condemned. Not only is it in contradiction to their own philosophy, but it is self-defeating in the long run as well. Political rivals do not disappear merely because they are excluded from one's events and a refusal to meet them in open debate will only encourage the sloppy thinking which has plagued the anarchist movement in Australia for decades. Further, it is an invitation to non-anarchist tendencies to return the favour.

Despite the criticisms above, I emerged from the conference encouraged. All the problems I saw were long-standing, while the best points of the conference were new developments. There are more people in anarcho-syndicalist (3) groups in Australia than at any time in the last 20 years and membership continues to grow. Further, as noted above, there seems to be a level of seriousness about thoughtful discussion and working co-operatively that hasn't been present before.

The conference was called by one of the smaller groups in the movement, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Group - Melbourne, in order to float a proposal for a federation. As such, it was the activists of the movement who were the target constituency. Though I missed the session where it was discussed, reports indicate that interest in a federation came mainly from ASGM members and unaffiliated anarcho-syndicalists. The other groups will probably want to be having more extensive co-operation and contact before they are ready to take the step of forming an organisation to formalise the process.

If anarcho-syndicalists in Australia can build on the gains displayed at the conference, tackle gender issues successfully and gain the courage of their convictions in relation to freedom of speech, the movement will develop strongly. I sincerely hope so, because the world needs anarcho-syndicalism more than even most anarcho-syndicalists realise.

**Greg Platt**

## Notes

1. The term "anarcho-syndicalism" means anarchist unionism. It derives from anarcho-syndicalism's origins on the European continent in the late 19th century.

2. The Industrial Workers of the World is a revolutionary union which flourished, mostly in the USA and Australia, in the first two decades of the 20th century.

3. The term is used loosely here to avoid complex definitional issues.





## War on the waterfront

Tom Bramble, *War on the Waterfront*. Defend Our Unions Committee, Brisbane, 1998. 64pp, \$4.

Reviewed by Steve Wright

This pamphlet is a very useful publication. Not only does its author offer a clear and coherent account of the wharves dispute, and its place within the broader picture of Australian class relations (for example, the ACTU's longstanding embrace of strategic unionism, and State agendas towards workers' organisation), but he avoids pulling punches when assessing the cost to wharfies of the deal that followed. Last but not least, *War on the Waterfront* is also useful in offering some insight into events in Brisbane during the lockout, all the more precious given the overwhelming attention paid then and since to Sydney and Melbourne.

Tom's Preface nicely sums up his central concerns: given "the inspiring elements of the mass struggle by Australian wharfies and their supporters and the lessons that we can learn from their successes . . . why, when the Government and employers were on the ropes, did wharfies have to give up so much?" (p.4). A large part of the answer, it is suggested, lies in the top-down nature of the strategy developed by peak union bodies in response to Patrick's lockout: the dependence upon industrial courts; deference to the ALP machine; more broadly, the insistence that members and supporters exercise "discipline" whilst leaving the important decisions to those who know best.

As both the East Swanston Dock "community assembly" and the 6 May city stoppage illustrated, many workers in Melbourne took to the wharfies' cause with enthusiasm. At times, indeed, aspects of this enthusiasm caught those attempting to run the dispute on the wrong foot. But if a somewhat longer lead was needed in Victoria than in New South Wales (let alone Queensland where, as Tom documents, union officialdom kept a tight rein on developments), those who spent any length of time at the pickets could have had few doubts as to how the dispute was managed.

It is now a year since the lockout began. How much have we

actually learned over the past 12 months? Since then we have seen something of a wharves dispute in miniature unfold at ADC in Melbourne. Here too a long, "community assembly" finally ended with the announcement of victory, although in reality many issues were left to be resolved in a setting beyond the direct influence of the workers concerned. As *War on the Waterfront* spells out plainly, such settlements are the legacy of years of union practice, wherein the unilateral pursuit of workers' interests must always be constrained by enterprise profitability. After all, the argument goes, if the bosses can't make money, who will give us jobs? Then again, if one accepts its premises—as most members of our class do at present—this is a powerful argument indeed.

In the face of this, Tom's own conclusion—that a new militant and anti-capitalist current is required in the unions and workplaces—seems somewhat forced. Of course, it's a considerable improvement upon assertions such as "build the party and all will be well", but it still begs the question as to the material circumstances within which such a current can emerge and flourish. This is particularly so given that restructuring which (too often with union complicity, as *War on the Waterfront* shows in the case of the wharfies) has thrown earlier forms of shopfloor into disarray. In the absence of the exploration of such circumstances—of the meaning of class composition today—we are left at best with wishful thinking along the lines of "if we had some ham, we could make a ham sandwich—if only we had some bread" (apologies to vegan comrades). Nor is it sufficient any longer to appeal, as Tom does, to the aging of capitalism and the narrowing margins for winning improved standards of living as spurs to a forthcoming outbreak of militancy: perhaps, instead, it's better to accept that there is still too little we understand about the consequences of past defeats for the future prospects for working class power.

Of course, *that* is another debate—and another series of pamphlets. In the meantime, *War on the Waterfront* raises important questions in its well-argued account of the wharfies' dispute, and for these reasons alone deserves to be widely read and discussed.





"This is a house in Richmond which, unfortunately, has been condemned. It is occupied by a family of eight"

The Herald  
August 1936

# Lock out the Landlords!

**April 7 1933, Melbourne**

*A real estate agent, Gahan, is caught setting up the unemployed by initially renting houses out cheaply and then hiking the rents once the tenants have settled in. Those who can't make the increase are then evicted. A picket of 200 people confront him at his office and force him to abandon upcoming evictions and to lower his rents.*

**July 1932, Wollongong**

*UWM members wreck auctions of houses which the unemployed have lost to the banks by outbidding everyone else and then waiting for the crowd to disperse before declaring they have no money.*

**4 February 1931, Melbourne**

*600 march to an employed worker's home in Larnoo Avenue, West Brunswick, to stop bailiffs from taking his possessions to recover debts. The bailiffs are confronted and most are convinced to leave. However when a moneylender and the head bailiff refuse to go they are dragged out and beaten up. Police arrive and arrest one person, but are surrounded and forced to let him go. During the melee the money lender's car is destroyed.*

*Lockout the Landlords!* chronicles the mass resistance that occurred across Australia during the Great Depression, when tens of thousands were thrown out of their homes and onto the streets. Across Australia pickets and protests were organised to disrupt and prevent evictions and auctions.

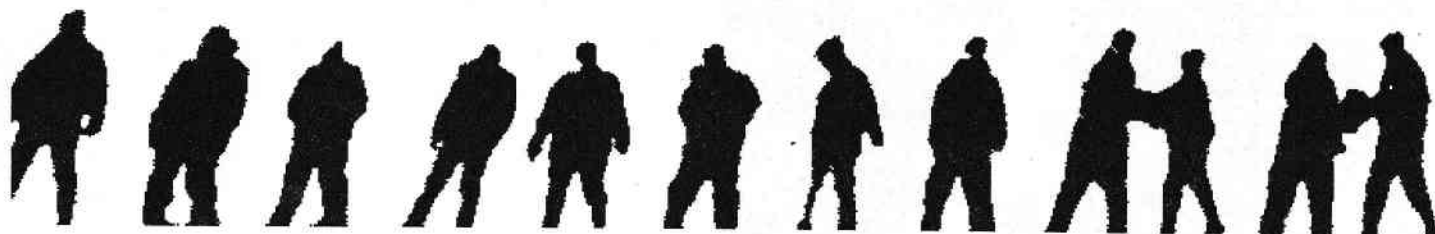
Unemployed people often organised against evictions through

branches of the Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM). Dominated, but not wholly controlled by communists, the UWM campaigned for a decent level of dole and against "work for the dole" schemes, dole forms and other forms of harassment. Their main position was that the unemployed were not responsible for their situation and should not have to suffer for it. To achieve their goals they organised protests, deputations, soup kitchens, "dole strikes" and occupations. A number of UWM members spent time in prison as a result of their actions.

The UWM also helped set up Anti Eviction Committees, many of which lobbied for the unemployed to be exempt from rent. These groups employed a number of strategies against bailiffs, landlords, finance companies and others who preyed on the unemployed. The committees would approach people in danger of eviction and offer to set up pickets and provide food, childcare, help with moving, etc. They would usually then go to visit the owner or agent and warn them that any eviction would be resisted. Deputations would also go to councils and government departments to try and force them into providing facilities for the homeless. On some occasions the picketers would occupy and barricade houses and on others they would take revenge on the owners by destroying them. The pamphlet lists just a small number of the hundreds (if not thousands) of actions taken around Australia during the depression, mainly drawn from the Communist Party newspaper, *Workers Weekly*.

*Lock out the Landlords!* is available from radical bookshops or from PO Box 199, East Brunswick Victoria 3057 for \$2.50 (including postage).





CAN masthead

# Collective Action Notes

One of the most interesting American radical journals to appear in recent years is *Collective Action Notes* (CAN). Now a twice-yearly tabloid, its latest issue (#14-15) runs to 32 pages, and is chock full of material concerning workers's struggles and self-organisation against capital and the state in a range of locations, from India to Western Europe.

A central figure in the CAN project is Curtis Price. We recently caught up with him for this interview via e-mail.

## How did CAN come about?

It was a modest attempt to achieve several goals, all of which have waxed and waned and probably changed, in emphasis if not in spirit, since CAN's inception. The first purpose was to try to provide news and analysis of current conditions and class struggles, initially with a particular focus on the US. ECHANGES, an European bulletin published in French and English editions, was a role model of sorts.

A second purpose was to attempt to keep in some sort of loose informal contact people who were around ultra-left ideas and/or groups in the 70s but were now pretty much dispersed. Related to the above was the growth of anarchism as a pole of attraction for younger and newer radicalized people, as well as the steady decomposition of Trotskyism. For younger people interested in theory and analysis, the current anarchist scene doesn't always address their needs adequately. For others moving away from Trotskyism and other forms of Leninism, council-communist and libertarian socialist ideas have their own appeal since they were the first and the most consistent from within Marxism itself to challenge the worker's state theory of the Soviet Union. Related to this, council communism/libertarian socialism always has had a healthy emphasis on workers' self-activity; a focus which is shared with the best of anarchist-syndicalism and autonomist marxism. An irony is that there is probably more receptiveness to these ideas now than even in the post-68 period; then Maoism and Stalinism were the dominant tendencies within the US left, and most libertarian socialist groupings were small and short-lived. Today, in a much smaller radical milieu, there is increased interest at the same time that there are no formal groups in existence! So CAN hopefully can contribute in a modest way to the process of networking and critique, without pretending to take on the project of regroupment.

Rather an open-ended process of questioning and analysis is needed, particularly in relation to changes in the forms of current class struggle. As part of this process, updating and extending council communist/libertarian socialist ideas to address these contemporary challenges in a non-dogmatic way, instead of remaining a product of certain historical periods, such as the experience of the German Revolution. I think too discussing the role of hidden and informal resistance in the workplace, both present day and historically, without falling into the traditional traps of over-exaggerat-

ing or under-exaggerating these events, is something CAN will increasingly focus on. You can pick up leftist papers and read about what unions are doing or not doing or about particular strikes, but never in these papers read about what is happening in a workplace outside of such visible struggles - the role of informal work groups and cultures on the job, the everyday small skirmishes, etc.

## How has the project evolved?

In form, CAN has evolved from a newsletter format to a full-fledged tabloid. In content, I think there has been a definite shift away from the orientation of the earliest issues towards simple chronologies of strikes and other struggles world-wide, toward longer analysis of specific struggles such as the Liverpool Dockers strike and Kamunist Kranti's work in Faridabad. With the new expanded format, longer theoretical articles can be included. More people participate in the project but geographic dispersion is sadly still a major problem. The CAN Web site has made it possible to significantly circulate long out-of-print or poorly distributed texts from Pannekoek, Mattick, ECHANGES, and others that mere reprinting through traditional channels would make prohibitive.

## What's planned for the next issue?

Probably a major piece on the current situation in the US, provisionally entitled 'USA: Fragile Prosperity? Fragile Social Peace?', as well as more first hand reports from France and Italy.

CAN is available in a number of Melbourne's left bookstores (Barricade, Grasslands, New International), from the altered collective (PO Box 1006, Brunswick, Vic, 3056) or from the publishers at POB 22962, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA. Australian cash or cheques in US dollars are both accepted for subscriptions (A\$12 for 4 issues). The CAN web site is located at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379>

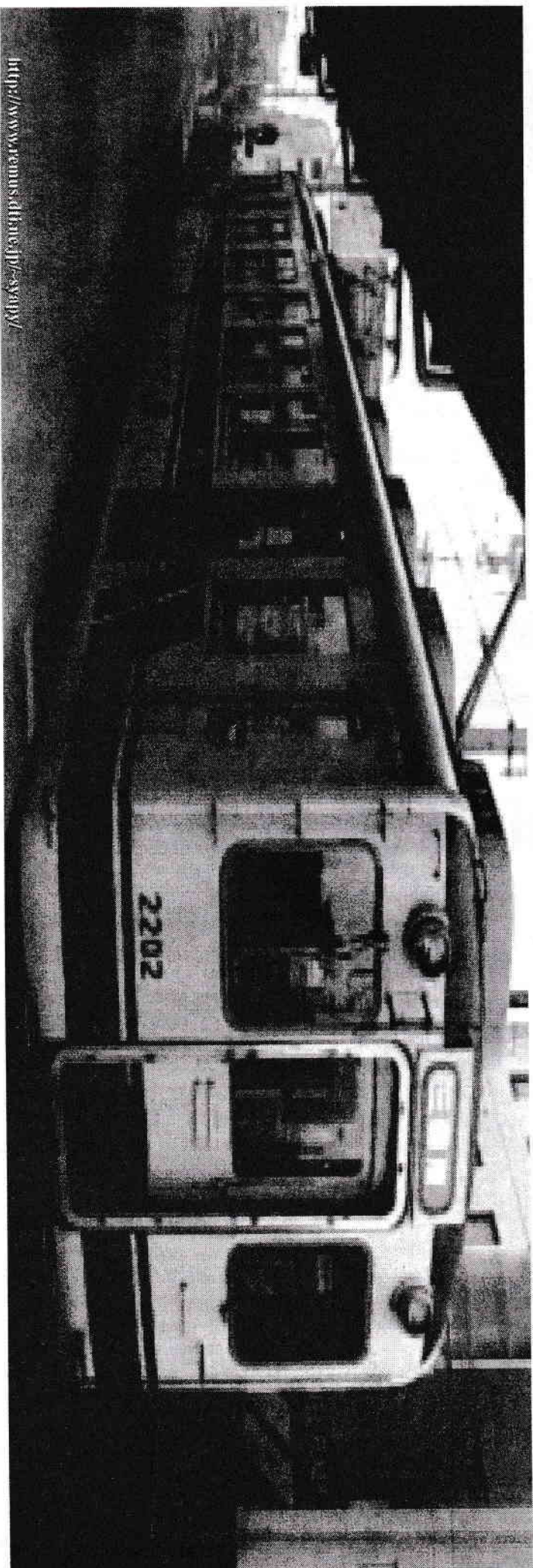


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