



Australian Marxist Review

Theoretical journal
of the Socialist
Party of Australia

- ★ *Our Changing World*
- ★ *Dialectics of Nature and Weather*
- ★ *Humour is Serious Business*
- ★ *Racism*
- ★ *Privatisation*
- ★ *Media in Australia*
- ★ *Alienation*
- ★ *New Struggles for a New Decade*

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CONTENTS

Our Changing World	Peter Symon	5
Dialectics of Nature, and Weather	John Baker	20
Humour is Serious Business	Rob Gowland	33
Racism	Habib Fares	37
Privatisation	Bill Dawson	41
Media in Australia	Bill Briggs	48
Alienation: The Worm in the Apple	Vic Williams	52
New Struggles for a New Decade	Ray Ferguson	57

Our Changing World

Report by General Secretary Peter Symon
to the SPA Central Committee
October 27, 1990
(edited)

An ABC radio commentator remarked: "What a time to go capitalist", when linking up the economic program being adopted in the Soviet Union with the economic woes now settling over the capitalist world.

The stock market crash of 1987 was, perhaps, the first big break signaling a period of instability in the economies of most of the capitalist countries with the very real prospect of a deep recession being forecast in some countries. We have learnt not to underestimate the possibilities of the capitalist economies finding reserves, resources and policy options to stave off the sort of depression which overwhelmed the capitalist world in the 1930s. But today, the accumulating problems seem to be much deeper than for many decades.

There are many indices being published by a variety of research institutes, banks and government departments, most of which paint a rather gloomy picture.

The main share indexes tell one part of the story. The Japanese Nikkei Index has declined by over 40 per cent. In December it stood at 39,000. Recently it broke through the 20,000 barrier in a downward direction only to recover to about 24,000 at present.

The US Dow Jones index is also heading downwards. In October 1989, it stood at 2650 points but is now 2450 or thereabouts. Twelve months ago the price of oil was about \$US18 per barrel but now fluctuates between \$US35 to \$US40.

The Australian share index has also dropped from over 2000 to about 1400, a fall of about 30 per cent.

The conflict that erupted between the US President and the Congress and Senate arising from the enormous US budget deficit reveals some fundamental problems and the sharp disagreement about how to deal with them.

In 1980, the US Budget deficit stood at \$US74 billion. It was the time of the election of Ronald Reagan as President. He embarked on a massive arms build up. The aim was to have the US stand up following its defeat in Vietnam and, of course, to arm against the "evil empire". By 1986, the deficit had risen about three times to \$US221 billion, created by the increased arms expenditure and the Reagan decision to cut taxes on the rich.

In 1989, the deficit still stood at \$US218 billion. The direct budget deficit is added to by the fact that the US Federal Government is guarantor for what are called the savings and loans (S & L) industry in the US. These are similar to the building societies and trust fund institutions which have proliferated in Australia and provide investment services for mostly small investors.

In the US, the savings and loans institutions are guaranteed by the government. When they go bankrupt, as many of them do, often because of corruption or what any honest person would call robbery, the government has to pick up the losses and pay up.

Neil Bush, George Bush's son, is one of those involved in this racket. In this case, the government guarantee is costing about \$US1 billion.

When the government's guarantees to cover possible S & L bankruptcies are added to the budget deficit, the gross Federal debt rose to \$US900 billion in 1980. It had blown out to 2,900 billion in 1989, a three times increase.

Another figure which indicates the state of affairs in the US is that government interest payments on borrowings are running only second to the military expenditures. The military industrial complex, the banks and other financial institutions are doing very nicely out of the US taxpayer.

The argument going on in the US at the moment is quite simple. How to meet the enormous cost of servicing the debt and feeding the military industrial complex. Bush wants to cut social welfare programs even further, though they are nothing to crow about even as they stand. The Democrat majority — and remember that mid-term elections are to be held in the US in a few weeks time — insist that taxes should be raised on the rich. A compromise appears to have been worked out but it is certain that the American poor and the working people will continue to be the losers.

Intensified competition

Another feature of the situation is the intensified competition between the major imperialist blocs.

America's relative economic position has been steadily declining compared to that of Japan and Germany. The reunification of Germany and the likely economic and political unification of Europe in 1992 will further weaken the position of the US.

In 1981, the US international investment position or balance of payments — that is, the difference between the inflow and outflow of capital, interest received and interest paid, the value of imports and exports, shipping and insurance costs on overseas trade — gave the US a credit balance of \$US141 billion. By 1988, the balance had gone into the red and reached \$US533 billion, in 1989 about \$US600 billion and is expected to reach \$US1 trillion soon. (An American trillion is a million million.)

However, the article in the CPUSA magazine *Political Affairs* from which these figures are taken warns that US investments overseas are undervalued as are US gold reserves which are valued at only one-ninth of their real value. However, the figures denote very far-reaching negative trends.

But what of Japan? The decline in the share index has already been mentioned. An article in *China Daily* of October 12 says that if the spectacularly inflated land

prices in Japan collapsed, the world financial system could follow them.

That is because Japan's banks are "up to their elbows" in real estate loans and are now endangered by falling property values. The article says major Japanese corporations have been planting their excess cash in land at a furious rate since the mid-1980s, driving prices so high that the real estate value of Tokyo alone exceeds that of the entire United States. The article says a \$100 note placed on the ground is worth only about one quarter of the ground under it. There are now signs that land prices may take a dive. A similar path has been followed in Australia and the results have already become apparent here.

GATT negotiations

We should keep our eye on the outcome of the negotiations on tariffs and trade called the "Uruguay round," currently reaching their finality. There is a deadline with only about two months to go and no agreement reached between the major players on a number of questions, the main one being the inclusion of agricultural products in GATT and the question of subsidies on farm products.

There is no agreement between the US which wants subsidies on farm products abolished over ten years, a position shared with Australia, and the European countries which are strongly resisting such a move. There are other disputes such as whether services should be included in GATT.

There seems little likelihood of agreement. If the talks break up without agreement, an all-out trade war could follow. In such circumstances, Australia is likely to be an early casualty. Australia is not a member of any of the big imperialist blocs. The argument revolves around the old topic of free trade or protectionism which can never be satisfactorily overcome so long as countries refuse to accept the principles of "mutual advantage" in their trade relations.

A report to the United Nations Economic and Financial Committee about three weeks ago gave a "pessimistic view" for world economic development. It expected economic growth rates on a world scale of only one per cent, the lowest since 1982.

Oil prices

The high price of oil is having a devastating effect in many countries, particularly the less developed. High oil prices have hit East European countries and will add to their foreign debt which, the report says, is expected to grow by \$US3 billion this year and \$US9 billion next year. The Soviet Union could benefit from the higher price of oil, but the disruption of its economy will limit the advantages which could flow to the USSR from the higher oil price. An objective of the US action is to control Middle East oil and, thereby, be in a position to impose its domination over its imperialist rivals, Japan and Germany in particular.

Latin America, South and East Asia and African countries will all be hit hard. The foreign debt of the developing countries is expected to amount to \$1,200 billion in 1990, says the UN report.

If we are to generalise the present situation of the main capitalist powers, we would have to say that they are facing chronic instability, an intensification of financial crisis indicated by many bankruptcies, including big companies and banks, stock market swings and currency fluctuations. The main direction of the attempts to solve economic problems is seen in the savage attacks on the wages and condi-

tions of workers and massive attacks and cutbacks in social welfare. The scientific and technological revolution is used to intensify exploitation and reduce employment. There is intensified competition between the rival imperialist powers.

The pressure on the Third World countries by imperialism is also increasing. Conditions are worsening, bringing the possibility of social discontent and upheaval. Aware of this situation, the capitalist ruling class is waging an intense ideological campaign and strengthening its repressive powers and the repressive organs of the state.

Australian situation

The specifics of the Australian situation reflect the general situation internationally: currency fluctuations, trade imbalance, debt problems, the consequences of the unbridled lending and borrowing policies of the last few years which are now leading to bankruptcies and sell-offs. Elders IXL, Murdoch's News Corp, Bond, TNT, Skase, some banks, the Victorian and West Australian Governments, Burns Philp and Estate Mortgage are all in big trouble or have already gone bankrupt. We have given detail about these matters before and hardly need to go into them again.

TNT and News Corp are closely linked in some deals. TNT share value has slumped by 50 per cent since October of last year. Murdoch has also seen a sharp drop in share values. Both these companies have high borrowings and big interest bills to meet.

The indebtedness of the Victorian Government has reached the sum of \$32.6 billion, of which \$16 billion is in unfunded superannuation. This amounts to over \$7,000 for every man, woman and child in the State.

The policies pursued by the Australian governments can be explained quite simply. They are aimed to bolster the capitalist system, make it more profitable for capital, give it more power and scope. This means that wages and social welfare payments have to be lowered. It means strengthening the position of the TNCs, deregulating the system, privatising as many industries, institutions and services as possible. Everything that is done swings around this objective and how to achieve it.

That is what is meant by the claim of the Labor Party leaders to be better managers of the economy than the Liberal Party. This, of course, is not simply a matter of economic policy but the ability of Labor governments to control and direct the working class and the trade unions while this policy is being implemented. For those who do not voluntarily comply, there is the ever present big stick.

It is worthwhile to say something about some specific aspects.

Interest rates

High interest rates are a means by which to attract foreign capital as well as to make big profits for banks. The interest rates were substantially higher than those being paid on deposits in other main capitalist countries. But much of the capital that was attracted was purely speculative or was deposited in banks for the sole purpose of reaping high interest earnings. It was not put to any productive work.

This policy had its inevitable consequence. Businesses which borrowed for expansion or simply for overdrafts had enormous interest bills to meet. The banks skimmed all the cream and sent businesses into the red and then into bankruptcy.

It is for this reason and this reason alone that interest rates are now coming down. If ever a case existed for the re-imposition of government control and regulation, it applies to the banks. There are strong and convincing arguments in favour of bank nationalisation.

The petrol companies also come into this category. If ever there was an obvious rip-off, it is to be seen in the last couple of months. There is hardly a shred of reason why petrol prices should have gone up at all in Australia.

Australia is about 85 per cent self-sufficient in oil. The owners of Australia's oil wells are not having to pay any extra costs because of the Gulf crisis. But they moved immediately with the connivance of the so-called Prices Surveillance Authority and the government. The lame excuse is that if the higher prices were not made available to these producers, they would have simply sold the oil overseas to other countries. But the Australian Government has powers to license exports — why not exercise those powers over oil?

The new excuse is the decline in the exchange rate of the dollar but in view of the fact that only a small fraction of the oil used has to be imported and would be affected by the dollar exchange rate, this is another dishonest and unjustified reason. Unfortunately, the Australian motorists have not yet come to realise how they are being blatantly ripped off. The government is deadly silent about the situation because it is also a major beneficiary from the substantially increased revenue it skims off.

The organisations which have led the campaign against Australia's participation in the Gulf are beginning to take up this issue which affects every motor vehicle owner and the community generally who are all affected by the oil and petrol price hike and its consequences.

Superannuation

We have commented before about the real reasons for the introduction of superannuation. It is the eventual elimination of government paid pensions. Another aspect is the use to which the huge super funds are being put.

The accumulated funds are said to amount to about \$160 billion already and this figure will climb to about \$600 billion in the next ten years. These funds are being invested in Australia and overseas and are becoming a main source of capital.

It is workers' money, but neither the workers nor the trade unions have much say in what happens to it after those who administer the funds hand them over to those who actually invest. Only a very small number of these funds are administered and invested by the unions. It is a very dangerous situation. If super money is invested in shares when their price is, say \$10, the value of the investment will be halved if the share price drops to \$5. This happened to superannuation funds during the 1987 share slump.

Now, according to daily press reports, the government is suggesting that super funds be used, at least partly, as investment in venture projects. This is precisely the area which brought Estate Mortgage, Pyramid and the Victorian Economic Development Corporation undone. They invested in dubious property projects, holes in the ground as they are often referred to. It is also clear that corruption abounds in this field.

Another fact of life about superannuation is that many employers are not contributing their part of the super deal even when they are required to do so under legally binding awards. In these circumstances, some workers will miss out and be lucky to get back even what they paid in if the economic situation worsens. Companies will go bankrupt before paying out super.

We are seeing what can happen in the case of Estate Mortgage and its "trustee", Burns Philp Trustees. When the depositors of Estate Mortgage decided to sue Burns Philp Trustees who might have been obliged to pay out millions because of dereliction of their trustee obligations, they simply decided to go into receivership.

There are very powerful reasons why the trade unions should urgently interest themselves in the activities of the fund managers and act to secure the workers' money.

Privatisation

The decision of the Labor Party to adopt the privatisation proposals of the leadership represents an abandonment of the traditional commitments held by the labour movement since its inception. It turns the Labor Party openly into an alternative party of big capital and moves Australian politics towards the type of Democratic/Republican party set up in the US.

The Labor Party changes cannot be simply dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders or with the belief that all will be well once some of the present leaders are hoisted out. We are now dealing with a fundamental policy decision on privatisation which is going to be pushed through in areas other than those specified in the resolution. There is a deliberate policy of running down public enterprises and imposing on them managements which are committed to privatisation. They are being deliberately obliged to pay high dividends to the Treasury and then told that there is no money for capital development.

But there is more to it than that. The membership of the Labor Party is being increasingly disregarded with the leadership opting for leadership via medium of the mass media, particularly television. Social democratic parties are not now, nor have they ever been, socialist parties despite references in their programs to the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. They are parties of reforms within the capitalist system.

As the capitalist crisis develops, the possibilities of the ruling class being able or willing to agree to social concessions diminish. In the same period, we see the Labor Parties coming out with the idea that they are better managers of capitalism than the conservative parties, and willing to put into effect policies of de-regulation, attacks on social welfare and on the wages and working conditions of workers. In these circumstances, they move more and more to the right.

What is said here does not imply that the social democratic parties are no longer social democratic, nor that we abandon our efforts to co-operate with social democracy on issues particularly with the Labor Party left.

When we come to rewrite our program, we will have to think more on this question.

Media monopolisation

Developments in the media are another area which have widespread effects. The

monopolisation of the media is being strengthened even further. The merging by Murdoch of his evening and morning newspapers in both Sydney and Melbourne and the developments in the commercial TV stations are aspects of this.

The policies of the Federal Government appear to be contradictory at the moment, but we have no reason to believe that the government has different policy objectives in this area. Hence the suggestions of doing away with the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. Apparently it was too much for some in the government and the media networks when the ABT decided that that illustrious Australian Alan Bond was not a "fit and proper person" to hold a TV license.

The subsequent decision of Minister Beazley to strengthen rather than weaken the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal is probably due to the very strong reaction from trade union and other circles when the press suggested that the ABT would be weakened or even done away with.

We should not underestimate the influence of Murdoch over the Prime Minister and others and this may be seen at work in the discussions going on to link the ABC and Murdoch in the Paid TV proposals. Murdoch, who has already got his fingers burnt in overseas Paid TV ventures, may attempt to off-load some of his debts on to the Australian government which would be only too happy to help out.

Murdoch, like others, is getting into real trouble because of his borrowings and the decline in his business fortunes as the whole system runs into trouble. "The higher they fly, the harder they fall" may come to pass for Murdoch, just as it did for Bond and others.

Democratic rights

We have in the past related attacks on democratic rights to those contained in trade union legislation, limits on the expression of democratic rights in demonstrations, in the discriminatory actions of the police or, as is the case in NSW at present, the extremely harsh policy being imposed in the State's jails.

But an equally sinister and perhaps even more dangerous aspect of democratic rights relates to the use being made of computer files, the tax file number and the Multi-Function Polis (MFP).

Let it be repeated: the unseen and unfelt scope of computer surveillance and control is only just beginning to be realised. Its possibilities are extremely far-reaching. That is a main reason for opposing the MFP. Our opposition is not related to which country might put up the capital or even its future use in the development of new weapons, important as these aspects are. It is related more to the potential and massive restriction on democratic rights, the surveillance that becomes possible by use of high-tech, the mind-bending that is already being practiced by use of modern methods of communication and genetic engineering that is just around the corner.

A long time ago, the book *Brave New World* drew a stark picture of the very sort of world that the scientific and technological revolution has now brought into the realm of the possible. That is what we have to understand and respond to. The promoters of the MFP are not sitting down doing nothing. Seminars are being held in all States, extravagantly and competently organised, to sell the MFP. They are worried by the initial opposition but are not going to give up easily.

We have submitted our CC resolution to the public inquiry that has been organised and we should follow it up in all States where this inquiry will take public submissions. South Australia, as the first recipient of the MFP blessings, has a particular responsibility.

The Australian people succeeded in opposing and stopping the introduction of the ID (identity) card but the same objective is being achieved in other ways. A very big step is being taken in this direction through the Tax File number project. It will be computer controlled and already millions of computer operations, which are checks on various aspects of the lives of millions of citizens, have occurred.

Alternative forces

The deteriorating economic situation, the real possibility of deep crisis affecting both the cities and the countryside, the political malaise which is also to be seen in Australia as well as other countries demands that we keep up with developments.

We have spoken before about the possibility of alternate political forces emerging. They are already to be seen. Substantial voting away from the two main political forces reached a new high across Australia in the last Federal elections. But this force remains diffuse and diverse with little firm direction, except that in this period it has a generally progressive direction.

The main expression will be seen in the activities of the various mass movements which combine a variety of political trends and organisations and in electoral work which remains, for us, pitifully weak. The idea of electoral co-operation, of forming some left/progressive/democratic political front, has not yet been realised in Australia. It is hardly being seriously considered by many of the organisations which, in time, could make up such a front of co-operation.

Countryside

Time does not permit more than a reference to the emerging situation in the countryside. Farmers are being impoverished by the high interest rates imposed by the banks, the adverse currency exchange rate and the low prices internationally for primary products.

A number of other issues are being raised such as the sell-off of processing works in the countryside, the question of organised marketing and problems of trade. Farmers are entitled to assistance and are being fleeced by the banks in the same way as are workers in cities. We should support the principle of organised marketing, irrespective of its shortcomings.

Our farming communities depend very much on overseas trade, yet the government's foreign policy has jeopardised many markets which might otherwise have been developed. The decades-long hostility to every socialist country and to the national liberation movements and Australia's subservient position to US imperialism have had their negative consequences in trade.

Once again we must raise the necessity for the working class organisations to concern themselves with the plight in the countryside, neither standing aloof nor appearing as opponents of legitimate demands being voiced by farmers.

Union actions

A significant rise in trade union actions is to be seen in the recent period.

Teachers, government workers, metal industry unions, the building unions, the waterfront and others have been in action on a number of issues. But they all concern aspects of the economic position, jobs, redundancy pay, wages, job conditions and resistance to the micro-economic reforms which the government and the employers are trying to foist on to the labour movement.

Some change seems to be occurring in the leadership of the ACTU following the "promotion" of Simon Crean into the government and his replacement by Martin Ferguson. However, there is not yet any clean break with the economic and political theories which were accepted as part of the Accord. Obviously it is going to take some time before some or any of the leading trade union officials are going to deal ideologically with issues facing the trade union movement.

The attitude to the Labor Party government, the idea of getting around the table with employers, the idea that increased profits have to precede jobs and wages, the idea that Australian workers have to make the sacrifices to enable industry to become "competitive" remain barriers to clear thinking and class actions.

Restructuring

The government, employers and ACTU leadership continue with their efforts to restructure the union movement. The government and ACTU leaders are pursuing a target of 20 to 30 large corporate conglomerates, in the name of "industry unions", but at times based more on political expediency. The government has introduced amendments to the Industrial Relations Act to eliminate unions of less than 20,000 members.

Progress towards amalgamations has been slow and there have been some setbacks with rank and file members rejecting some union amalgamations. Amendments to the legislation ease the criteria for ballots determining amalgamation and are aimed at speeding up the process.

The new legislation also strengthens the already considerable powers of the Industrial Relations Commission so that it can determine arbitrarily which unions have coverage of which work.

The majority of employers are pushing for single union (or preferably no union) coverage at their enterprises. Some unions, not only of the right-wing variety, are doing deals with employers and the government to gain sole coverage.

Either way, the intent is not to strengthen the union movement, with strong militant industrially based unions, but to tie workers into a corporate state model, policed by the ACTU and subservient to government and employers.

In the arena of wages, the ACTU leadership and government are attempting to make a difficult transition from a tightly centralised system, with its no extra claims and many "paid rate awards", to one that breaks with traditional relativities between wage rates and is primarily focused on enterprises.

The new wages system, if implemented, will involve negotiation of wages and working conditions at the enterprise or company level. This will either be through an enterprise agreement or award endorsed by the Commission or through an agreement that varies or is over and above an award which will specify the bare minimum.

"Over award" payments will be dependent on rises in productivity and on personal performance, with rates varying between workers carrying out the same or

similar work.

The government intends retaining and strengthening the powers of the Industrial Relations Commission, which will determine guidelines and awards and certify agreements. In this manner, there will be a tight ceiling, preventing the “free” operation of market forces.

While many employers are happy to go down this path, some have joined the Liberal/National Party Opposition in calling for total flexibility, without any centralised control.

Either way, the system will be based on productivity bargaining with employers, backed by the government and Commission, hell bent on taking back the gains of the last 100 years. Already unions are negotiating 12-hour days, contract labour and give-backs in return for paltry wage rises.

While union and award restructuring are necessary, the present processes are not working in the interests of workers. If they are not halted, workers will find themselves working in 19th Century conditions with a union movement paralysed ideologically and organisationally, incapable of defending workers’ interests.

Our trade union comrades must give much attention to uniting the left and progressive forces in their unions, building rank and file movements. Rank and file groups in the Ironworkers, Clerks Union, ATEA, Hospital workers, Glass workers are examples. There have been some significant gains by the left in union elections, particularly in Victoria.

We have already declared the priority task of building in the workplaces, recognising that there have been significant changes in the composition of the working class and in their organisations. It is possible to get groups of Party comrades and other progressives and militants together. We should not overestimate the possibilities or try and over-organise, but persistence and the adoption of the right political and economic policy, tasks and organisational forms will improve the situation.

Left/progressive unity

We have recognised the existence of different levels of unity — the unity of the left and a unity bringing together a wider range of parties and organisations. These concepts remain valid but little real progress has been made. We cannot let up on either of these tasks but we have to admit that some of our possible partners in a left unity have gone off in a different direction at present.

The CPA is expected to hold what its leaders hope will be its final liquidationist congress in February of next year. The party is being run down although *Tribune* is still being published. A circular is now going the rounds calling for support for a “Broad Left Newspaper”. It is obvious that it would be a replacement for *Tribune* should it get off the ground which is a doubtful proposition.

Opposition to the liquidation of the CPA remains quite strong but the organisation of this group and its political objectives and future course are still under discussion. A draft statement which we have seen is one with which we could substantially agree.

In an apparent attempt to get in first, *Direct Action* has already announced that it will turn itself into a “broad” newspaper. Several personalities have indicated their

support for this project.

Is it possible for two such newspapers to exist? Even one is doubtful — two is an impossibility. The politics driving these two projects are the same and are a move away from the idea of a revolutionary party publishing its own newspaper, maintaining a clear and consistent line.

The ACU is falling on difficult times. We see little by way of activities. Its newspaper, *People's Voice*, has not been seen for some time. The ACU's National Secretary is now living in Tasmania and is contesting an official position in the Seamen's Union in another State. The ACU President is becoming a trade union General Secretary and is going to have little time for the ACU's needs.

Slow change for the better seems to be occurring in the CPA (M-L), reflected in a willingness to participate in joint activities rather than hiding themselves in isolation. However, except in Victoria, there is little to be seen of that organisation.

There is no reason for us to alter our approach to left/progressive unity. Where our comrades work in the spirit of our resolutions and statements, avoiding both sectarianism and the danger of liquidating the Party's role, good results follow. But there is one essential prerequisite for left and progressive unity — it is the existence of a much stronger Socialist Party than is at present the case.

The experiences in the *Bring the Frigates Home* coalition in Sydney hold many lessons for us — how to unite forces, how to stave off splitting activities, how to maintain the role of the Party, and so forth. Of course, this called for a lot of work. That is another essential ingredient of success.

Special Congress

The outcome of the Special Congress has been assessed soberly by those whose opinions have so far been voiced. Substantial documents were adopted after some discussion. There seems to have been general agreement in support of the assessments and the main direction of the documents. In these respects it fulfilled the objectives set for it.

Inevitably different opinions and shades of opinion will be expressed on various questions. This is to be neither feared nor put down. It is a disappointment that the opportunity was not taken by many who had ideas to submit amendments. Undoubtedly the document could have been further improved both in form and content.

A substantial theme expressed in various ways in the workshops, which seem to have been a successful innovation, was the need to question the democratic centralist practices and procedures of our own Party. As you know, this is a major theme in many communist and workers' parties. Everyone, to my knowledge, supported democratic centralism, but a number raised questions about our actual application.

The forms we have established in our Constitution and the efforts which are constantly made to involve the Party membership could be said to provide all the necessary conditions for a vigorous democratic centralist Party life. Obviously not everyone thinks that this is the case. We must continue to discuss it and, during the course of preparations for the next normal congress, we will have to look at our rules and their application.

It is a complicated and many-sided question and undoubtedly some attitudes will arise which are a reflection of bourgeois democratic ideas and methods. These do not offer us a good path to go down.

The necessity for a revolutionary party, dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism, the inevitable intensification of the class struggle, the magnitude of the struggles which will develop call for a certain type of party. That has been our starting point and if there are to be changes, we have to relate them to that question. The sort of party needed is directly related to the tasks it sets out to perform. However, this is not an argument or justification of shortcomings in the practice of democratic centralism.

The supplementary statement — *What We Must Do* — adopted by the Special Congress should not be relegated. In fact, it contains the outline of the *Program of Action* for 1990 which is to be finalised by this meeting of the CC.

Involvement with people

It must be strongly emphasised that it is our involvement with people and the specific issues and problems that they face which will determine our influence in the future.

I will give an example. Last Saturday there was a demonstration in Sydney streets concerning the situation in the Gulf. It was quite reasonable in many ways. But I believe the slogans had little relevance to the lives of many of the onlookers. The sloganeers chanted about the Gulf, the frigates, Bush's war, Hawke's betrayal, Palestine, Israel, Kurdistan, one even dragged in Bougainville. Some saw the need for a worker's revolution in the Arab countries!

But the most immediate connection between the Middle East crisis and the Australian people is the effect it has had on the price of petrol. Overseas air fares have already gone up as a result and the price of many other commodities will also rise. That is affecting everyone directly. And there is a good story to be told. The rip-off by the oil companies, the acquiescence of the government, the servile attitude of the so-called Prices Surveillance Authority, the customs duty that is pouring into the government's revenue as a result of the increased prices, and so on.

If ever there was a good economic issue to tie into an international crisis, this is it. But there wasn't a single slogan about that. No appeal to the people in the streets on that question. No criticism of the government for its attitude, no attack on the oil companies, no demand for their nationalisation. The closest to this issue was the slogan, "No blood for oil". This example illustrates a rather lofty detachment on the part of the left.

The direction of our supplementary statement, the resolution *Together With the People* which we adopted some time ago, and the *Program of Action* all have the idea behind them that we must become more knowledgeable and more involved in the real life problems of our people — yes, our people, those who we live and work with. What those issues are, how we take them up, how we present our views and so forth are all questions which need a lot of consideration.

The experiences of the parties in the socialist countries and elsewhere too show there was and is an isolation from the masses which must be overcome. It is probably more severe in the socialist countries than in the capitalist and Third World countries, but it exists there too.

Communist work

We sometimes talk about communists being tribunes of the people. They should be and can be, but at the moment we have few who can genuinely qualify for such an accolade. But people will not accept our policies or our leadership until they have the experience of comrades who personify these characteristics by their activities, steadfastness, maturity and wisdom.

Such comrades are not born but are made in the course of life and during their membership in the Party. I had an interesting letter from a comrade who left the Party several years ago but now declares his conviction that the SPA is on the right lines. He has not yet rejoined but, in arguing with another person who also left the Party and who also agrees with the general correctness of the Party's position, he writes:

"If it had not been for the Party I would not have dared try my hand at all manner of things, developed any skills which I might now have... The Party made me learn such skills, as it has forced hundreds and thousands of Australians over the years to test the water in so many spheres. Just think for a moment about any number of Party people in your acquaintance. Where have they come from? ...they have developed their minds in a way that others have not. The Party has actually created layers of intellect in many people, propelled people to come to grips with ideas and concepts which would not have been possible without the Party. It pushed people into using their brains and developing them. I think that we all owe the Party a lot in this respect".

What little we have done by way of political education and training has some effect. But our efforts are nowhere near enough. It is difficult and time-consuming and there are many disappointments but it is richly rewarding. It is an essential part of our education. We call it cadre training. It really means having not only a good understanding of politics and our ideology but also being capable of getting things done with an ability to organise and lead people. When it comes to doing things properly unfortunately, many comrades accept rather low standards. Work is shoddy and often belated. Often necessary things do not get done at all.

I will give one example. It is now two years since we took the decision to buy computers for the States and install modems for transmission of articles for *The Guardian*. It is about 18 months since we started to buy the equipment. Everyone is in favour, and we have criticised the socialist countries for their technological backwardness. What about our own backwardness?

As yet, only two articles (from Queensland) have been transmitted by this technology. There is always some problem which we fail to solve or which take ages to overcome. So far, our expenditure is an almost complete waste. I know that not everyone is able to do the job of getting the equipment up and running themselves. But there are comrades who can. There are also instruction manuals, courses of study which could be undertaken and so on.

This is only a tiny, trivial problem compared to those which have to be overcome in society and in the running of society. We have to become capable of overcoming such problems, otherwise our claims to lead the people to do really big things are just so much hot air.

Soviet economic developments

A lot has been said and written about developments in the socialist countries and this will be added to by the comrades in their reports from the Congress of AKEL and the anniversary celebrations just held by the Workers' Party of Korea.

As you know, the Soviet Union has adopted far-reaching proposals concerning its economy. All indications are that the economic situation of the Soviet Union continues to go from bad to worse. Whether the current measures will change the direction of events remains to be seen. It will, to some extent, depend on how the Soviet people see the changes, whether they will respond to them and whether order and stability returns.

It appears that the leadership has virtually swept away the old methods and means of managing the economy and has not yet replaced them with anything new. What they have in mind seems to dispense with central planning with emphasis given to local initiative, direct commercial contacts between the various industrial enterprises, both at a national and international level, with the right to establish virtually whatever commercial relations they may like.

Forms of ownership are being broadened and placed on an "equal" basis, with private ownership being seen as a desirable form and a means of getting the economy moving. There is talk of selling off public enterprises to either local, foreign or joint venture capitalists. Whether there are to be limits to this and where the line is to be drawn is not clear.

All of this and more is being advanced under the banner of "market forces" economics. We have already said quite a bit about this but we should continue to deal with all the aspects of the economies of both capitalist and socialist countries. The fact is that considerable interest in economic matters creates the possibility of many people learning a lot more about economics and economic problems than was formerly the case. Perhaps we can turn evil into good as time goes on.

Last week, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a cartoon which showed Gorbachev and Bush cooking sausages over a camp fire with Bush commenting: "...then there's deficits and loan crises and jobless and stock market crashes and bankruptcies and credit squeezes and popularity polls and..." It goes to show that our media commentators know quite a bit about economics and are by no means fooled about the direction taken by the Soviet leaders and understand the consequences better than they do.

We have no reason to believe that market economics are going to be any more successful in the Soviet Union simply because they talk about linking it all with "social guarantees" for the working people. Unemployment, social welfare cutbacks, exploitation, inflation, corruption and all the other evils of capitalism are absolutely certain to follow. The fact that the Soviet leadership is planning certain "social justice" measures shows that they know of at least some of the results of their economic plans.

The real problem is not that some steps are taken towards forms of private ownership or that central planning is changed to eliminate its "command and administer" aspects. The real problem is the belief that "market forces" economics is some sort of panacea and is capable of delivering masses of consumer goods and will get the economy moving.

Commodity exchange and a market exist in socialist economies. Goods are

bought and sold. But there is a definite adoption of capitalist concepts and an abandonment of socialist principles such as the abolition of exploitation. The real danger is that popular discontent in circumstances of confusion, frustration, anger and poor leadership could accelerate the swing to the right and the loss of government by the communists who, despite the current confusion, remain the main force for socialism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

Let us here, too, take advantage of the public discussion of developments in the socialist countries to enhance our understanding of these things. Theory and practice are going to be tested out before the eyes of the whole world.

We have characterised the present historical period as one in which the struggle between capital and labour is the main contradiction. This struggle is seen in the competition between capitalism and socialism and the struggle of the working class in all countries for reforms and revolutionary change. We have said that the historic period is one of transition from capitalism to socialism. This struggle has often been seen as one of struggle between the USA and the USSR. It was never simply that and the changed relations between these two countries does not mean that our characterisation is now out of date.

The reality is that imperialism continues to exist, its aims and objectives have not changed. It is still reaching out to roll back socialism everywhere and to reimpose its economic and political domination on all countries without exception.

That is our estimation but this view is being challenged and rejected by the leadership of the Soviet Union. We will have to substantiate it and check its validity against the unfolding events.

Friendship and criticism

A question we have to answer in our own ranks is the charge that current criticism of the policies being adopted by the Soviet Union are expressions of “anti-Sovietism”.

Friendship and solidarity with the Soviet Union is not a “thing in itself” but arises out of the Soviet Union being a socialist state, that it upheld internationalism, that it supported the oppressed throughout the world, that it opposed imperialism and so on. We have supported other socialist countries for the same reason. Our commitment is to these positions, to socialism and internationalism.

If the Soviet Union departs from these positions, that has to be assessed and, if necessary, we should say something. The days of a blind adherence to the Soviet Union, right or wrong, have gone and we should not mourn that.

Of course, there is room for different assessments and it is possible that some of our present evaluations may, in the long term, prove to be incorrect or partly incorrect. But to brand our measured statements, based on documents and not hearsay, as anti-Sovietism is not correct.

We will demonstrate our commitment to the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 at the coming anniversary functions which will mark this event.

The Dialectics of Nature and Weather: A Contribution to Discussion

by John S Baker

“Inter-related with the nuclear weapons and nuclear industry problems, climate stabilisation has become the central emergency of continued existence of this planet...

“The next ten to fifteen years are crucial in determining whether or not we can re-establish and hold the climate we have known... This is the ultimate challenge to re-establish a balance between earth and the atmosphere.”

Amended Draft Program (1989), Communist Party of Britain

Hurricane Hugo’s devastation in the Caribbean and the US seaboard, like that left by Cyclone Tracy and other cyclones in Northern Australia and island states of the South-West Pacific, and the levelling of British forests and towns by the great Atlantic storm may yet be shown to have some human or societal causes and so attract litigation. Weather and climate patterns begin to attract the attention of international conferences dealing with human rights and the environment (cf. United Nations Conference, New York, 9/12/88). Accordingly, will those mainly responsible for holes in the ozone layer or the rising incidence of nuclear or asbestos cancer deaths, or those mainly responsible for imposing the steady reduction of grain and vegetable nutrition and the poisoning of the food chains, avoid forever their Nuremburg examination?

Debates on the earth’s ecology, biosphere, climate and weather and how Nature’s resources — soils, water, minerals, air and our other species — should and should not be exploited extend and intensify, even though formal agreements, nationally or internationally, are rare: check with the remnants of the Southern Right Whales or the many endangered species on land.

Destruction of part of the Earth’s ozone layer, but resistance to ending the main causes from corporations and their political agents, make a wave in the international debates for a time.

However, whose is the ozone layer, who has rights over it? And who has any international right to stop the Exxons, Mobils, Shells, ICIs, Dow Chemicals or the nuclear agencies turning lakes, rivers, seas, oceans, lands or the atmosphere into industrial sludge dumps? Haven't they a personal and corporate right to self-regulate?

After all, governments, corporations and many scientists have respected the rights of agriculturalists and industrialists in the earlier pollution of soil, water and the first layer of atmosphere round the earth. A great increase in cancer deaths admitted, but would there have been any nuclear industries at all had governments and most scientists heeded the people's protests from 1949?

Nevertheless, during the past two decades international society has been witness to the inauguration of a United Nations agreement on a small part of the seas and oceans — the New Law of the seas — achieved in spite of US-Israeli refusals to sign the conventions. Successful opposition to the US-Japan plans to mine the unzoned ocean deeps and also the US plans to turn Antarctica into a mining and oil-drilling site shows that the transnational corporations' 'right' to pollute the world and its atmosphere may, for a time, be successfully resisted. Human rights and the environment may be a challenge whose time advances rapidly.

Nature and humankind

It seems timely, therefore, to include within current considerations the question — are there now deeper challenges within the present relations of humankind and the natural environment of which humans are an important, if sometimes not very perceptive or caring, element? Last century, Frederick Engels shed some light on these relationships in *Anti-Duhring*:

Humankind “by no means rules over Nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like something outside of Nature — we with flesh, blood and brain, belong to Nature, and exist in its midst... all our mastery of it consists in the fact we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.”

A century and a half later, increasing numbers of people begin to pose the question — Do not we **and** our governments have an obligation to “learn (Nature's) laws and apply them correctly”, never destructively? More critics now begin turning to socialist managers, for whom Engels' perceptions should have been very persuasive, to ask whether their sensitivity to the advice of Engels has been greater than the corporate managers responsible for pollution of so much of the Earth.

Karl Marx in *Capital* (Vol 1, 111/V11) presented some of the relationships more gently than his colleague Engels:

“A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he greets it in reality. At the end of every labor process we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at commencement.”

These and many other perceptions of Marx and Engels on the relationships of humans to the natural environment may bring those in the various streams of the

Marx-Engels-Leninist philosophical tradition to a conclusion that some of the accepted ideas in the humankind-Nature relationship within both capitalist and socialist modes of production have an antagonism to Nature and, therefore, to humans.

The Socialist Party of Australia embraced some of these perceptions in its recent booklet *Good Planets Are Hard To Find*:

"Natures resources are the basis for all that lives upon the earth... and human actions are subject to the constraints imposed by the laws of the natural world."

Good Planets Are Hard To Find points out also:

"The uncontrolled exploitation of the environment and the plundering of the natural resources intensified under feudalism, reaching its peak under capitalism. Marx wrote: 'All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil'."

The truth of Marx's perception has been testified to by the dust bowls of the American mid-west, the salination of Australia's Murray-Darling Basin, Central America's Sahel, the Soviet South-East and India, Malaysia and Latin America. Deserts of older societies warned in vain. .

An unusual challenge to complacency about vast and imminent threats to the environment came from Dr Brown, Director of UNEP, when in Australia recently. (cf. The ABC's *Couchman Show*) He warned of his UNEP colleagues' fears about most global life-support systems collapsing during the next ten years.

New challenge

And now, a group of British Marxists and scientists have injected a new challenge within Marxism-Leninism into the Communist Party of Britain's Draft Program on *The Struggle for the Environmental and Ecological Security*.

This challenging document was included in the Draft Program, notwithstanding its radical nature. The document's challenge would seem to be situated within Engels' concept of a leap by humanity (at some time) from a realm of necessity into a realm of freedom. The dialectical leap is really perceived to be within the cycles of climate — ice ages and inter-glacial periods. They present this transition period of our planet's history thus:

"Around the middle of this century the dialectics of Nature went through a qualitative change from the balance of the earth and atmosphere we have known to rapid transition into an opposite process.

"We are at the end of another inter-glacial period... Unless we stabilise climate, human society as we know it becomes threateningly at risk from severe climate change and weather intensities, causing increasingly acute and widespread destruction of food supplies."

Within the British statement, there appears to be some conflict in the method of treatment of the earth-atmosphere, nature, climate and weather relationships. This may be due to necessary brevity in a political program still to be discussed. North American climatologists explaining the transition are sometimes as conflicting within their pragmatic frameworks.

It needs to be recognised that humankind could pollute the whole planet, short of a nuclear winter, whilst climate and weather, independently of humans, took a dialectical leap into another quality of weather and climate.

The laws of Nature, not the subjective views of humans, will determine the climate's next qualitative change, as they have during the millions of years before humans evolved. The British statement, in itself, and as one using the methodology of dialectical materialism, warrants attention by those agreeing and even disagreeing on the same pragmatic evidence.

An important acknowledgment of Nature's influence on climate agendas came from Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovsky during a conference of United Nations NGO delegates in Moscow in 1988. He made a call to European nations to abolish standing armies and destroy conventional weaponry and then direct the savings into a world fund for reparation of the environment:

"We have no time to wait for the full ripening of political conditions and removal of differences. All the more so now that it is no longer man, but Nature, which is dictating a program of action."

Swords into ploughshares now! A short time later at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly, Mikhail Gorbachev appealed to delegates to "end the aggression against Nature... Time for action is running out".

Earlier, the Californian scientists and unionists preparing the preamble for the State's Bill for an Emergency Climate Stabilization Act (1988) warned of the "natural forces which would shatter and redirect all social conflicts".

Democratic Party leaders, like Robert Farran, condemned the delays contrived by diversion of energies into Greenhouse "warming only" theories. The basic assumptions of the Californian amending Bill, like the one going to the US Federal Congress, are of the planet's transition soon, even proceeding now, from the present inter-glacial period into full ice age.

British assumptions could well be based on the work of their Dean of Climate Studies, Sir Hubert Lamb, Dr N J Shackleton and the many scientists and academics across the northern hemisphere whose views prevailed until, from about 1976, theories of a future global warming, sometime in next century, began to be promoted widely.

Global warming

Theories of global warming sometime during next century are attributed by some scientists and writers to the needs and global business strategies of 19 US oil, coal and gas corporations working through their present limitations towards the objective of a nuclear-based economy by year 2000. Dr Larry Ephron in a recent book, *The End: The Imminent Ice Age* (p 108), identifies the connections between the national and international energy corporations, some of the scientists and the institutes working together to promote the ideas of global warming:

"CO2 research money even comes directly from the fossil fuel companies themselves. The Scripps Institute of Oceanography (connected to big money through the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain) has been in the forefront of the warming theory since (Professor) Revelle made his proclamation back in 1957. (Svante Arrhenius who coined the term **greenhouse effect**, also ended

up at Scripps).

"The list of contributors to Scripps includes AMCO, ARCO, British Petroleum, Chevron, Conoco, EXXON, Japan Petroleum, Martin Marietta Energy Systems, Mobil Foundation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, San Diego Gas and Electric Company, SOHIO, TEXACO, and Union Oil Company."

Professor Kenneth Watt (Environmental Department, University of California, Davis, and editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica's environmental sections) explains something of the great disinformation campaign on climate and weather in a paper, *The Expanding Influence of Politics on Science* (p 1):

"Since June 1986, there has been a vigorous and apparently carefully orchestrated effort to propagandize the idea of global warming in newspapers, news magazines, and, most intriguingly, the newsletters of citizen action organizations, particularly environmental organizations. As one might expect from all this media attention, government has awarded large amounts of money to researchers who would publish evidence in support of the greenhouse warming theory. Indeed, for the last decade, only those scientists supporting this theory have received any money from government to do research on climate and weather.

"What makes this so curious, is that there isn't a shred of evidence that the world is warming; indeed, all available evidence suggests that every part of the greenhouse warming theory is incorrect or incomplete and that the world is cooling rapidly."

Many of the long-established scientists within British, French, Swiss, Austrian, West German, Danish, Canadian and the US climatology studies and those like Professor Victor Kovda of the USSR Academy of Sciences accept the empirical evidence of cycles of ice ages and their inter-glacial periods and the inexorably advancing ice age sometime soon.

Food crops

In letters to the Earth Regeneration Society (ERS) of Berkeley, Professor Kovda stresses the extended freezing of northern seas, increased snow and ice cover, extension further south of the permafrost, and contraction of the necessary growing period for food crops.

Professor C Bernard Schultz of the Nebraska Academy of Scientists has many followers in his projections on Canada's, Alaska's and Greenland's increased snow and ice coverage during the past 15 years, which have led to a fall in average temperatures in the region. In some provinces there has been a contraction of the crop-growing (necessary 41 days for maturation) periods. Some of Canada's "bread basket provinces" are now reported seriously threatened.

Schultz projects a mini-ice age for North America and the USSR by year 2010, when neither country will be able to feed its people or help now dependent people in the Third World. Typical of the descriptions of climate change today in the Soviet Union is that in a letter to the writer from Professor Kovda recently:

"In several areas of Siberia and the defrosted parts of taiga one can find 'is-

lands' of permafrost and strong winter freezing. Winters in the USSR getting more severe. The current inter-glacial period is much longer than the average ones — over 10,000 years. Albedo of the earth is re-enforced.”

In the US, one of the controversial climatologists who would support the British Marxist perception of a rapid transition into another quality of global climate, would be the widely read John Hamaker. In his and Don Weaver's *Survival of Civilisation* (p 93), they make this point:

“The information about past glacial periods is now sufficient to say with assurance that the climate cycle requires very close to 100,000 years to be completed. We can say that during that time there are only 10,000 years in which there is a temperate zone capable of supporting an agricultural and technological civilization. We are at the end of the 10,000 year period. If we are to have any chance of survival, we must understand the glacial process so we can take the necessary steps to eliminate glaciation.”

Weaver cites some of the supporting texts — Calder's *Weather Machine* (1975), Ponte's *The Cooling* (1976), Gribbin's *Forecasts, Famines and Freezes* (1977), and Roberts and Landefeld's *The Climate Mandate* (1979). Weaver's notes on the weather-climate cycles conclude with:

“The beginning of a 20-year changeover period from inter-glacial to glacial commenced about 1975 ... 1972 being generally seen as the approximate year when the world's weather became obviously 'abnormal'.”

More of a mainstream academic climatologist than Hamaker, Professor Reid A Bryson, Senior Scientist at the University of Wisconsin's Centre for Climatic Research, examined these issues in his *Civilisation and Climate Change* (p 9):

“This record (varying isotope ratios in sea-floor cores taken from continental glacier studies) shows that there has been a series of 'ice ages' in the last two million years, with an occasional interval, like the present, with less ice. These intervals with little ice usually last 9-12 thousand years. The present interval is about 11 thousand years old. Statistically it should be nearing its end; and scientifically, that would be the case as well.”

Samuel Matthews, senior editor of *National Geographic* (January 1987) confirms the conclusions by Bryson, Lamb, Kukla, Dreimanis, Hamaker, Weaver, et al. Recent French and Swedish studies on pollen deposits in glacial lakes reached similar conclusions. The French studies stressed the likelihood of a short transition period to ice age.

Studies on the cooling-warming themes at the Max Planck Institute and the Meteorology Institute in Hamburg rejected the warming theories. Earth Regeneration Society specialists in Berkeley have been emphasising recently the evidence that parts of the planet have already entered upon ice age condition.

Methodologies

Whilst the British Marxists may not be seeking identification of methodologies, which conform with the cooling climate modes, they appear to reject those of the modelling studies of the warming theorists. The Berkeley specialists, however, at times present their studies with insights and an elegance that would have sat well with Frederick Engels and Hegel. Their study, *Economics of Climate Stabilization* (Bryant, Malveaux, Fryday), matches the rigor of Engels' presentation methods:

“Life, this earth’s ecosystem, has been fine tuning its own climate in the world from the beginning of living matter by changing CO₂. CO₂ is a messenger substance, and a control substance for the biosphere and physical environment. It is also a trigger mechanism for major cycle changes. The basic survival problem before us is that of maximising global net CO₂ reduction to stabilize climate before we reach a point of no return in the current transition into the next glacial period. The economic problem becomes that of allocating resources within the constraints surrounding an optimum earth regeneration program ... including four major areas: soil remineralization, reforestation, energy conservation and alternative energy technology development. The **CO₂ budget** becomes the pivot of international and national planning and co-operation....

“If the full process of glaciation gets under way and automatically continues to build snow cover and destructive climate conditions, then it takes only a few years of crop loss before major food resources are lost. Technological systems will no longer operate due to storm, flood and earthquake damage. Starvation will be widespread. Within the period from 1995 to 2005 all of the world’s population will be at risk.... A shift in direction, in economic, social and cultural goals is essential and can still be effective. This is the greatest challenge we have ever faced.

“The complexity of the general systems approach to inter-glacial/glacial transition is made worse by comprehensive economic system problems.”

The economic, political and cultural problems surfacing through the general systems analysis of climate, weather and environmental disturbance are those which earlier generations of Marxists may well have highlighted, even if over-schematically, as a matter of course — first principles.

The pragmatism and empiricism of those accepting market economy philosophies, their decentralisation of social responsibility and enhancement of the personal, selfish good against the common good may correspond with the free-market economy assault on the environment of the whole planet, with the corresponding assaults on Nature in the socialist economic and cultural environments.

Aggression against Nature

Then, correspondingly perhaps, football riots in the north of England and Europe proceed in harmony with ethnic and nationality-based violence in west and eastern Europe, the Americas and Africa — all corresponding with the general aggression against Nature extending and intensifying into all parts of the planet.

It is simplistic to see the transnational corporations as the world-wide and worst polluters, pollution flowing from every pore and joint of their organisations. Most governments equal their preparedness to pollute where not prevented — 99 per cent of humankind stands witness to the other one per cent’s day-to-day assault on Nature.

The Berkeley specialists’ general systems analysis presents their positions more pointedly than other groupings.

“Due to a major obstacle, we have lost ten years when the world’s resources could have been directed toward an international soil, forest and energy program. The major obstacle has been a combination of certain top industry and

finance people in the US, and four or five scientists placed in positions to control key funding and publications. This has resulted in selective financing for ten years going only to those who do research and reporting under the false heading of 'warming only' from CO₂ increase. **This also includes US funding to institutes and research centres in other countries.**"

So, the offensives commencing within the institutes supported by the 19 major oil, coal, gas corporations extended world-wide even into the delegations attending international conferences to protect the global environment. It corresponded with the vivisectionists and those organising the horrendous tortures of billions of animals for useless experiments gaining control, for a time, of those societies for the protection of animals, birds and other species. The general systems analysis takes the indictments into the general tactics of the pollution lobbies.

"Since October 1976, there has been an unofficial policy in the US to refer to **CO₂ increase in terms of global average temperature warming**. This buries the facts of the extremes world-wide of heat, drought, storms, tornadoes, freezing, snow cover, and earthquakes that are destroying human life, crops, homes and utilities at an accelerating rate.

"The false story about warming only, melting poles and rising oceans **represents a political decision**, not any new scientific findings as of October, 1976.

"Why the cover story of warming only? First, the fossil fuel industry did not want to be faced with cutting back on production and moving rapidly into alternative source investments. **Second**, a more general policy position; the US controls much of the world's surplus food and has this for leverage in control of people and resources in many parts of the world.

"International co-operation around an earth regeneration program will mean a shift in policies and economic activity. The short run position of 'warming only' has run its course. It is clear that a dead and dying workforce, together with an inoperative technology and infrastructure, would not be conducive to long run profitable investments. **The era of false information is coming to a close.**"

CIA studies

The dialectics of Nature and climate would, presumably, contain some elements of not only intelligence systems, but also the transnational corporations. Coinciding with the rising perceptions among climatologists about vast changes in Nature and climate — some accelerated by corporation indifference to environments — the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA.) commissioned two university impact team studies on climate and weather: *Climatological Research as it Pertains to Intelligence Problems* and also *Potential Implications of Trends in World Population, Food Production and Climate*.

After some time and apparently rejection by intelligence agency leaderships, the two studies were published under the title *The Weather Conspiracy — The Coming of the New Ice Age* (Impact Team Report Books, Ballantine, New York). One can only speculate on corporate reactions leading to the rejection of the impact team studies. However, the CIA stated its position as follows:

"The function of research within the Agency has been directed at defining the

relationship of climatology to the intelligence problem. It is increasingly evident that the intelligence community must understand the magnitude of international threats which occur as a function of climatic change. These methodologies are necessary to forewarn us of the economic and political collapse of nations caused by a world-wide failure in food production. In addition, methodologies are also necessary to protect and assess a nation's propensity to initiate militarily large-scale migrations of their people as has been the case for the last 4,000 years.

"Recently some archaeologists and historians have been revising old theories about the fall of numerous and elaborate civilizations of the past, such as the Indus, the Hittites, the Mycenaean, and the Mali empire of Africa. There is some considerable evidence that these empires may have been undone not by barbarian intruders but by climatic change."

The reports to the CIA seem to have been influenced considerably by the work of Professor Reid Bryson, who was rightly described as "one of the world's most renowned and respected climatologists today", one who, at times, derides the "greenhouse" theorists' methods of sustaining government and corporate funding of their studies.

Dr Irving Kaplan, former scientific adviser to the US Navy and consultant to the United Nations Law of The Seas committees and the Club of Rome, recorded an interview with ERS members Alden Bryant and Barbara Logan at Berkeley in January 1984. The interview provides further insights into the interaction of government and intelligence representatives, corporate and academic interests in the period when the focus of many within climatological studies turned from its widely accepted realities.

Kaplan: In 1955, Cesare Emiliani brought forward what we consider the modern contribution to deep climate research. He discussed the ice ages of the past and from them was able to predict what was happening now. Beginning in 55, we find the start of serious modern climatology ... just about all researchers stressing the cooling aspects going down into the next ice age.

"In 1957, the counter-theory was brought to the fore, and this was the carbon-dioxide warming theory born from Dr Roger R Revelle and Dr H Suess, both of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. And in 1957 began the controversy between the major theories of climate — one cooling, one warming. The contention grew ... the interested population being split up into two active viewpoints, very strongly opposed to each other....

"In 1976 I was at a meeting in North Africa. My friend Roger Revelle was also there. I had given a presentation on climate to the *Pacem in Maribus* group and the Club of Rome. Roger and some other people ... left, went to a very important meeting in Washington DC of the National Academy of Sciences and of the deeper government — the security aspect of government.

"At a meeting in Washington in May of '77 of the American Geophysical Union ... two people, one a scientist, the other a member of the President's economic advisers ... made it clear that should one wish to study climate in the United States, the preferred position was warming. Scientific effort given to cooling might not get very far because the 'unofficial' position of the United States was warming theory. It was made very clear ... despite the fact that the major-

ity of the world's climatologists were not warming theorists. (But) we are all economically controlled. We all have jobs, we all have positions. (And this was extended to) people all over the world.... People from every country. **This was a big public relations effort and it went on for years**"

Paid for? Dr Kaplan: "**It was all tax money.**"

The planet's qualitative change in climate is, for the British Marxists, "the central emergency of continued existence on this planet". However, a round-up of views among leaders of the British Conservative, Labor and Liberal/Social Democrat parties showed no similar understanding or concern; certainly no interest in their methodologies of understanding.

Disinformation

But from the early 1970s, at the highest levels of US Government, intelligence services, sections of the science establishment and transnational corporation power, changing weather and climate were given the highest priorities. These priorities were articulated through a global program of disinformation and indoctrination, which was about 90 per cent funded by the Department of Energy.

Nowhere could the conformance to the disinformation program have been more complete than in Australia, where the mass media — electronic and print, government or corporate controlled — has yet to admit one adequate article, report or even 'letter to the editor' to printing or broadcast. The disinformation program has operated from within the schools through to the highest levels of the science establishments, professional societies and the local, States and Federal Government.

Of such perverse, anti-democratic procedures, US President Dwight Eisenhower warned when he talked about the rise of a military-industrial complex and government sponsorship of scientific research:

"... a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity ... the prospect of a domination of the nation's scholars by federal employment, project allocations and the power of money ... is gravely to be regarded."

Jim Green, on the congressional staff of the House Science and Technology Committee, made it quite explicit recently, speaking on a projected major study of the greenhouse effect by the Department of Energy:

"As far as I can tell, the bottom line for the administration is that this (greenhouse) study falls into the category of making sure that the government stays off the back of industry.... There seems to be an effort underway to make sure that any research that might lead to the direction of greater regulation is stopped before it gets to that point." (cit. Ephron, *The End*)

Obviously, the dialectics of climate debate and concrete practice proceed with the internal conflict as potentially active as in any confrontation perceived by the fathers of Marxism or their forerunners among the early Greek scientists and philosophers.

The factor keeping the debate sterile and circumscribed is the lack of adequately mounted opposing ideas and debate from nation, class and ideological opposites of the US masters of debate. And it has been rather ironic that, from the beginnings of the warming versus cooling debates, a

leading Soviet climatologist, Professor V I Budyko, has sometimes been the collaborator on influential papers with Dr Roger Revelle of the Scripps Howard Institute. (cf. *Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Warming* cited in Dr Fred B Wood's *Philosophy of Testing Hypotheses and Matrix of Climate Theories versus Evidence*)

Dr Budyko, in a television interview in London recently (reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*) even claimed that: "The great majority of continents will be in a better condition of moisture. Deserts should disappear in the future. In warm epochs there was no desert."

Nevertheless, the self-movement within the debates extending across the northern hemisphere on climate reached a high-point in Dr Fred B Wood's report to the International Society for General Systems Research (Budapest, June 1987) on *Philosophy of Testing Hypotheses of Climate Theories versus Evidence*. (cf ERS Report, Berkeley, California)

Carbon dioxide

His report analysed 12 notable papers, commencing with the Revelle-Budyko paper on *Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Warming* of 1969, tabulated against 46 experiments and data-sets dealing with global cooling and warming. The examination resulted in a four-to-one acceptance of John Hamaker's *Soil Nutrition Glaciation Cycle Thesis* and a seven-to-one rejection of *Simple Greenhouse Warming Theory*. However, there was a consensus on the central themes of the cooling mode:

"We must reduce the release of CO₂ into the atmosphere by reducing the burning of fossil fuels, reforesting the earth and stopping the deforestation of tropical rainforests.

"In addition, the *Soil Nutrition Glaciation Cycle Thesis* (Hamaker) points to the need for replenishing the natural distribution of minerals and trace minerals in the soil and protection of the natural micro-organisms in the soil needed for transferring the minerals from the soil to tree roots."

The areas of agreement within the 58 studies and the conclusion of the British Marxist program are of some significance. The main ones are:

"(a) the cumulation of 10,000 years of soil demineralisation from leeching and erosion, (b) the subsequent dying of forests, drying out under heat and drought, retreat under infestation, together with human destruction of forests, (c) increase in atmosphere carbon dioxide (CO₂) from 270 parts per million to 350 ppm in 100 years, plus increase in cloud, snow and ice, particularly in the last 20 years, have interacted to produce a final cooling mode worldwide, leading into glaciation conditions."

These British Marxists' assumptions about a dialectical self-movement of Nature and climate agree with those in the Bills for Emergency Climate Stabilization/Earth Regeneration Acts (1988) now coming before both Californian and US Federal Congress senators and members. Each group projects a possible halting and turn-back from the transition or leap into ice age climate.

However, the opposing forces to any halt or turn-back of the transition into qualitatively worsened climate and weather are those resources, organisations and habits accompanying humankind out of the modes of production of this inter-gla-

cial period — ancient, Asian, feudal, capitalist, Third World under-developed, and socialist.

Today, most of those habits and forces are perpetuated within the system of transnational corporations, their conglomerate bases in the OECD countries and in the state capital and social capital formations of the now changing East European modes. Their self-movement is the maximisation of profit out of, at times, deliberate destruction of the natural environment. These are the trigger-forces and driving forces which accelerate the transition to a qualitative different, hostile climate, which will ensure the destruction of much of the other species and most of humankind and its civilisation.

Within the self-movement of climate, what do we perceive to be the forces or main phenomena of weather — the atmospheric conditions prevailing at some place or time, those circumstances created by heat or cold from hour to hour?

In the preamble to the Bill for an Emergency Climate Stabilization Act, the Californian Democratic Council listed some of the main phenomena — storms with heavy rain and wind, tornadoes, blizzards, floods, heat spells, drought, cold, frost and freezing conditions, snow and ice storms and build up, acid rain, earthquakes, volcanic action... part of the many phenomena of climate intensifying across North America.

Of all this, pointed out Karl Marx in his *Philosophical Manuscripts*, humankind is a part, not something outside of it:

“That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to Nature means simply that Nature is linked to itself, for man is part of Nature.”

Famine

And man and Nature are presenting some peoples across the world with horrendous situations on their way to a qualitatively worsened climate. For example, according to the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (at a Rome conference in 1983):

“... a significant portion of Africa’s 518 million people face the worst consequences of food shortage: famine and starvation. An estimated number of those exposed to these dreadful ills range from 150 to 225 million persons of all ages. Already 450 million are reported to suffer from chronic malnutrition and about 40 million are believed to die from it each year. Seven million of them are children.

“Twenty-six counties (half the continent) were believed or identified to be hard hit by the drought at the end of 1983. Indeed, the number is expected to increase to 36 or even more with countries by 1984 if the weather anomalies continue. (*They have* — *JB*)

“Based on the existing knowledge, the drought conditions in Africa and other parts of the world are obviously related to the climatic changes that are partly induced by anthropogenic factors. If this is evidently correct, then the food crisis and famine in Africa may be partially connected to the global weather changes induced by human activities, particularly in the industrial countries where high consumption of energy from fossil fuels increases atmospheric CO₂.” (cf *Drought and Food Crisis in Africa*, Lako Tonqun, University

of California, Davis. ERS paper)

With the atmosphere and weather of the planet responding to the self-movement of global heat transference — hot air, clouds, rain and thunderstorms of the torrid and temperate zones — being drawn upwards increasingly in the changing convection currents and then deposited as rain, snow and ice in higher latitudes and altitudes, the colder winds then move southwards bringing with them the increased coldness which accelerates the transition to glaciation. This results in an accelerated drying out of the most populous, already starving regions of Africa and extend drought conditions into southern Asia, Australia and Latin America.

Famine conditions intensify most in Africa. Correspondingly, perhaps, the northern hemisphere's triggering of increased drought and famine across Africa advances with the northern hemisphere's imposition of North/South inequalities in raw materials prices, the technology gap and debt.

There is a macabre quality within the socio-economic features of the cooling-warming scenarios. Columbia, for example, becomes the key region for increased narcotics addiction in the North Americas and criminality within this North/South connection at many levels. At the same time, EXXON becomes not only one of the worst polluters of oceans and atmosphere in and around the Americas and a prop of corporations and governments involved in narcotics and crime, but also the chief exploiter within Columbia's huge open-cut coal mines.

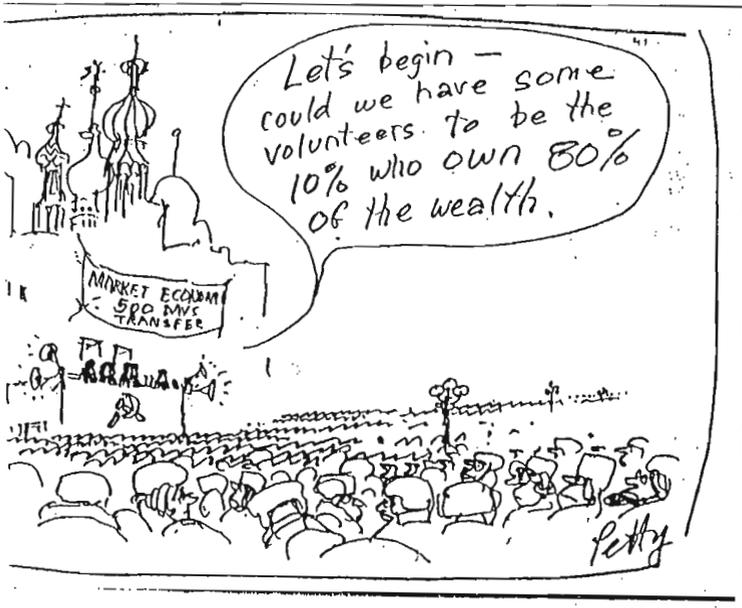
However, the logic of the British Marxists using their tools of dialectical materialism, like the more classical climatologists of North America developing their general systems analysis within climatology, may still need the beauties of Marx's weaving spiders and the architectural skills of his bees, if Nature, not excluding its transnational corporations and EXXON boardmen, is to be halted and then turned back from its inexorable advance into a qualitatively worsened climate.

Humour is Serious Business

by Rob Gowland

THE AGE, Thursday 27 September 1990

THE ~~AGE~~ AGE



It is a generally admitted truth that humour is a serious business. Bruce Petty's cartoon from the Melbourne Age may be funny, but its subject matter is very serious indeed.

Petty was reacting to the adoption by the Supreme Soviet of a plan to create within 500 days the conditions for changing the USSR to a "market-based economy". With incisive wit, the cartoonist cut through all the propaganda surrounding the "500 Day Plan" to expose its essence: the return of capitalism.

Not the small-scale private enterprise of the New Economic Policy of the 1920s either. As Petty shows, we are talking about full-scale, unfettered late-20th-century capitalism, with all the social, cultural and political iniquities that this implies.

Of course, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the Soviet Government and people will follow the 500 Day Plan to its logical conclusion, or that the necessarily gradual implementation of a “market economy” is an irreversible process. But to a distressingly large number of Soviet citizens, commentators and advisers, the chance to live under the same type of economy and society as is now “enjoyed” in Western Europe is a prospect devoutly to be desired.

Bruce Petty has lived — and, more significantly I think, worked — under capitalism all his life. He has few illusions about the nature of the beast. Perhaps this explains how he can see so clearly what Soviet political and economic planners seem to be unable to discern: that capitalism is inherently unjust. No amount of “de-ideologisation” will take away the ruthless exploitation of people, resources, even entire countries, which is the basis of capitalist wealth.

George Bush may talk of a “kinder, gentler America”, but homelessness, poverty and crime continue to escalate. When Soviet economic policy adviser Sergei Smolnikov of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations wrote of the capitalist world that “a country’s might is now determined ... by its capacity to bring out the creative potential of each individual human being”, ★ we can only conclude that he is living in a fool’s paradise.

The Soviet people, by rights, should know all about the nature of capitalism already. After all, the Russian empire which they overthrew was a capitalist power. The exploitation of labour in the Baku oilfields, for example, had been brutal, even savage. Russian and foreign capitalists viewed — and used — the workers of Tsarist Russia as an inexhaustible source of cheap labour, devoid of rights and ruthlessly suppressed in the event of any show of spirit. Much the way imperialists view the Third World today.

Regrettably, there can be very few Soviet citizens alive today with first hand experience of those times. For most Soviet people, even their parents never knew the rigours of life under capitalism. Their only knowledge of the rival social system is at second hand.

They have of course been taught about pre-revolutionary Russia in school. One can only conclude from recent events and statements that the quality of this teaching left much to be desired. Certainly, many students never absorbed it or simply refused to believe it.

Of course, it must be difficult for anyone born and raised in a workers’ and peasants’ state to fully comprehend capitalist society. The distress of recent Russian emigres to the USA over the lack of comprehensive free health care and other services they took for granted illustrates this lack of comprehension.

In the 1920s and 30s, there were some famous films made in the USSR about the condition of workers in pre-revolutionary Russia. Donskoi’s great trilogy on the early life of Maxim Gorky, Eisenstein’s *Strike*, and a number of lesser known films portrayed the harsh reality of working-class existence in the days of a “market economy” in Russia.

★ *International Affairs*, August 1990

But Soviet cinema could not restrict itself to accounts of how bad life had been under the old regime! Contemporary life, as well as the true history of Russia and even the future, had to be dealt with. As the years wore on, the number of film makers who could actually remember the capitalist era — who could visualise from their own early life the poverty, hunger and misery that prevailed in the villages and the “workers’ districts” of the towns — diminished until they all but disappeared.

Since the Second World War, I can recall only one significant film that dealt with capitalist social relations, with the plight of the poor under pre-revolutionary conditions: Trauberg and Roshal’s *Freemen* of 1955.

For almost 50 years, Soviet films set in the late 19th or early 20th century have portrayed, in the main, the life of the upper middle class. Adaptations of Chekhov, Turgenev and Ostrovsky have been popular. While the characters in these films have been variously sad, heroic, vicious or comic, the works themselves are essentially sympathetic portrayals of the middle and upper classes. The barbaric nature of the *basis* of the wealth was seldom — if ever — presented.

Small wonder then that so many Soviet citizens today look back at the period of the Tsars with equanimity, bathing the image in the rosy glow of nostalgia. Nicholas II has been “researched” and found to have been not a monster but a human being — benign, considerate, even caring. Therefore, the system he represents must also be better than it has been painted. This approach is rather like basing an assessment of Nazism on Hitler’s well-known kindness to dogs.

The memoirs of the late Marshall Zhukhov contain an account of his early life under Tsarism, a record of institutionalised poverty and ill-treatment that would be enough, you would think, to put anyone off wanting to live under such a system. Unfortunately, modern Russians make their comparisons not with life in old Russia but with life as they perceive it in Western Europe today, a land of abundant wealth, food and work (for anyone “willing to work”).

Capitalism itself has assiduously cultivated and promoted this image of the developed capitalist countries, the image of a technologically advanced society where everyone has a car and a house or apartment, and life is essentially good. Money problems and threats of eviction only seem to occur in comedies, and crime is presented in the media as a source of excitement rather than a serious cause for alarm.

There are very few major cultural works designed for a mass audience (films, television dramas, mainstream theatre, popular novels) from developed capitalist countries that deal with the social and personal repercussions of unemployment or homelessness. Where is this generation’s *Grapes of Wrath*? Rare indeed is the film or television series that deals with blue collar workers.

We are so used to films about people who live in big houses and never seem to work or be bothered about the cost of living or deterioration of their working conditions, that we hardly notice anymore. But as a way of judging living conditions in our society, movies and other mass entertainment produced by the bourgeoisie are as useful as the view from a hotel window or a tourist bus.

In Karen Shakhnazarov’s 1988 Soviet film *Messenger Boy*, the young central character is asked by his new girlfriend’s father about his ambitions in life. The lad answers frankly: he wants an easy job, a car and plenty of money. For people with

this approach to life, the capitalist world must seem to offer unlimited opportunities.

The element missing from the answer of Shakhnazarov's messenger boy is any hint of a collectivist spirit, any awareness that the well-being of others must also be taken into account, or that working together for the common good brings rewards to the individual as well as the collective or the community.

The replacement of concern for the collective by concern for personal interests by looking out for number one, has been a steadily growing phenomenon in Soviet life for quite a few years. (Not surprisingly, Shakhnazarov's next film project is about the nice Nicholas II and his "tragic death".)

In his cartoon, Bruce Petty singled out the gross inequality of capitalism as the single most striking feature that is absent from the socialist society of the Soviet Union. But to the person like the messenger boy, who is concerned only for his own interests, these inequalities of capitalism mean "opportunities for individual initiative". Far from being deterred by the prospect of great social inequality, there are those who are eager to embrace it.

On the other hand some Soviet citizens clearly believe that Soviet society is already rife with inequality. Could capitalism be any worse? Sophisticated rumormongering and skillful manipulation of resentment over alleged inequalities — ("hunting lodges" and "Swiss bank accounts" for "top Party officials" — was a significant component in the overthrow of socialism in the GDR.

The irony of supporting the introduction of capitalism out of a concern for the "inequalities" of socialism must by now have been borne in on the former citizens of the GDR with a vengeance.

The people of the GDR could have benefited from incisive cartoons, skits, songs and commentaries, exposing the true nature of the "freedom" Kohl was offering. But artists and cultural workers on the one hand, and the mass media on the other, were among the leaders of the "pro-democracy" movement.

In the USSR too, there seem to be few opportunities for opponents of "market forces" to gain access to the mass media. Ironically, the most telling and witty cartoon on the subject is in the bourgeois media, the *Melbourne Age*.

There can be no doubt that in the event of a return to capitalist relations in eastern Europe and the USSR, we will see a revival of cogent political cartoons as the injustices of the system call forth an inevitable response. But that is a heavy price to pay for some clever cartoons and a painful way to learn the truth.

Racism

by Habib Fares

Historically, racism is one of the consequences of the slave system, where it was used as the ideological justification for the domination and dehumanisation of peoples in order to provide cheap labour for the ruling classes in society. In the modern era, racism spread rapidly as a result of colonialism and with the introduction of slaves to the Americas.

Colonialists and slave owners did their utmost to introduce the outrageous concept of their genetic superiority over oppressed peoples. The ideologists of racism have found strident supporters and advocates in bourgeois circles.

Karl Marx criticised the work of one racist theorist, stating that he wrote a book “above all else to prove that representatives of the ‘white race’ are, in their own way, like gods among the other people; on this basis it is indisputable that the ‘noble’ families within the ‘white race’ are the purest of the pure”.

While the racists were justifying by all possible means the differences in intellectual development of people by the separation of humans into “superior” and “inferior” sections and promoting their concepts of the particular inferiority and mental backwardness of “coloured genes”, Marxism proved with scientific evidence that the differences in the intellectual development of peoples are not due to racial or national features but to historical developments.

Modern sciences specialising in the study of humans reject racists’ false claims of superiority and inferiority of this or that genetic group. On the whole, science supports the concept of oneness of all members of the human species and the physical and mental equality of all peoples, regardless of the colour of their skin or other physical differences.

Racist oppression and the spread of racist ideology persisted through the transformation of society from pre-monopoly capitalism to the present period of domination by reactionary imperialism. The most aggressive bourgeois circles — at the forefront of which were the German fascists and the Japanese militarists who promoted the outbreak of World War II — were strong upholders of racist theories.

Despite the fact that the defeat of fascism dealt racism a heavy blow, it was not eradicated from the social life of our planet. While the major strongholds of racism (Nazi Germany and militarist Japan) were defeated, this did and does not mean the end of the ideology of racism and racial separation throughout the world today. The apartheid regime of South Africa is a clear example of this.

Anti-humanitarian

Racism is a reflection of the anti-humanitarian nature of capitalism. In the face of the changes achieved by progressive and socialist forces, imperialism counters with virulent campaigns of racial hatred and genocide.

The victories achieved by the peace, socialist and liberation forces in the post-World War II period have increasingly reduced both the effectiveness of racist propaganda and the implementation of racist policies in daily life, due to the strong resistance by peoples of the world against racism in any area of life.

However, recent political and social changes occurring in Eastern Europe have opened the door, once again, to these outrageous and unacceptable concepts, internationally and in Australia.

Not only internationally, but locally as well, racist theories and racist campaigns are finding a conducive climate. It is the climate of deep economic and social crisis, created by the inherent nature of capitalist system, which puts ever increasing pressure on working people; a climate of weak trade union positions and the constant attacks on its more militant forces; the divisions among the Left, the domination of right-wing forces over the Australian Labor Party and the strong positions occupied by the New Right among conservative forces.

It is to our shame that Australia is still known internationally — along with such countries as South Africa, Israel, the USA and the UK — for being a state of entrenched racism and racist practices against non-white people.

Racist concepts in Australia have a deep historical background, reaching back two centuries. From the beginning, white colonialists adopted the ugliest policies of racism — genocide and the destruction of Aboriginal culture and society — to achieve full colonial settlement of the continent.

These racist policies have been thrown back over the years — at least officially — because of the heroic struggle of the Aboriginal people with support from advanced sections of the working class and some other strata in Australian society.

Nevertheless, unofficially, racist practices have been a continuing feature of our society, denying the rights of Aborigines and non-English speaking immigrants.

Currently, racism and racist practices are taking various forms in Australia. There have been increasing campaigns in recent times against non-white residents and migrants, particularly Asians and Middle Easterners, and lately against Arabs specifically.

Behind these campaigns of hatred stand capitalist monopoly circles — both multinational and local — which have the aim of placing the blame for the current economic crisis on migrants and attempting to divert attention from real issues and to focus it instead on ethnic and racial differences. This also serves to create a suitable climate to further their reactionary policies and attacks on the rights and gains of the working class movement.

Media

The mass media play a major role in feeding these campaigns. They do not miss a single opportunity to make full use of increasing racism in our society. Hardly a day goes by without the media carrying local and international news designed to

deepen racial hatred and divisions within the Australian people.

Most recently, the Gulf crisis has been used as a rich source of racism, targeted against an important section of the Australian population — the Arab community. This includes war propaganda and fabricated news suggesting the possibility of terrorist attacks from within the Australian Arab community.

Zionist organisations in Australia which have strong links with local monopolies and with Israel and which themselves are based on racist concepts such as “pure blood” and the “Chosen People” make use of this anti-Arab campaign to the fullest extent.

Old and new colonialists and Zionists are responsible historically for undermining the Arab image in the consciousness of the Western public, including Australia.

They have constantly used this cheap weapon to convince the West of the legitimacy of their occupation and domination of the Arab world and its natural wealth, above all its oil.

The Zionist movement has made full use of this weapon in recent times to justify its offensive attacks on the Palestinian people and other Arabs. Imperialist and Zionist circles, by means of the mass media, have successfully planted in the minds of millions of Australians a stereotyped picture of Arabs which totally contradicts reality. This stereotype portrays Arabs as dirty, ignorant, uncivilised, violent and unable to make use of the rich natural wealth of the Arabian region.

The dominant monopoly circles in Australia are trying to conceal and denigrate all the scientific and cultural achievements by Arabs over the centuries — in mathematics, philosophy, poetry, astronomy, geography and so on — because acknowledging such achievements would provide evidence to refute the essence of racist ideology based on genetic concepts.

Reactionary circles conceal the background of the many individual Arab Australians who have occupied outstanding positions in politics, trade unions, science, intellectual, business and other creative fields. These individuals are never portrayed as Arabs or of Arab descent because to expose their backgrounds would be to simultaneously expose the hollowness of racist allegations about Arabs. In contrast, unacceptable social behaviour by Arab individuals is widely publicised.

Cruel irony

It is a cruel irony that the mass media often uses the outrageous behaviour of reactionary Arab rulers to denigrate Arabs generally. The irony arises because the Arab masses are actually struggling to overthrow these rulers, who are allies and puppets of United States imperialism, and replace them with democratic governments.

A glaring example of this is the Kuwaiti rulers whose waste and conspicuous consumption of astronomical wealth and abuse of democracy and human rights are infamous. However, this did not stop the United States and its Western allies, including Australia, occupying the Gulf in order to defend and restore a non-existent “Kuwaiti democracy”.

Racist campaigns and practices against citizens of Arab origin in Australia occur in all fields — from the factory floor to the supermarkets and the schools.

These practices and campaigns are not only immoral but also anti-humanitarian. They damage not only the Arab community but also Australian society in general. Racist discrimination against half a million Arab Australians inevitably has a negative impact, politically, economically and socially, on Australian society today and for future generations. Prejudice and discrimination against one section of the community provokes a hostile counter-reaction within that group and instability within one section increases hostility and instability within the society as a whole.

Instability, hostility between groups, lack of unity within the community and particularly between workers — aren't these the aims of the racist campaigns against Arabs and other minority groups within Australian society?

The Australian people have paid a high price in their struggle against racism and their involvement in racist wars. Today, they are paying a cost which may escalate dramatically because of the Australian Government's subservience to United States war plans in the Gulf. These plans are based on racism, domination and the theft of the Arab people's natural resources.

Threat of fascism

Increasing racism in Australia creates the basis for a new upsurge and expansion among the fascist forces which exist at present — National Action, the White Australia Movement, and so on.

The monopoly circles would not hesitate to use these forces in their own interests against specific ethnic groups but this can easily develop into fascism which is directed against all progressive people, regardless of their ethnic or racial origins.

It is important that the Australian people should take a serious stand against all racist concepts, trends and campaigns since they are the opposite of science, progress and friendship between people. They are the opposite of multiculturalism which is so important for social justice and progress in Australian society.

A stand against racism is a barometer of humanity. Those people who are convinced by any form of racism cannot be regarded as humanitarian. It is not humanism to talk about equality and justice while at the same time accepting oppression of Blacks and migrants, holding secret talks with racist regimes or sending troops to attack people demanding equality and liberation.

A stand against racism is also a barometer of democracy. A characteristic contradiction of the democratic bourgeoisie is to be lenient towards racism and harsh towards national minorities. Such a democracy is a contradiction in terms when it supports racism within bourgeois democracy and tolerates and feeds the racist strongholds that still exist in the world.

Racism and national chauvinism are the opposite of internationalism. It is the duty of communists and progressive people to wage a determined struggle against racism and national chauvinism as part of the struggle against imperialism and the monopolies which are the main enemy of patriotism and national liberation movements.

Privatisation

by Bill Dawson
Central Committee member
Socialist Party of Australia

The motive forces for privatisation

The current debate around privatisation and deregulation has come to the action point with the Federal Labor Government poised to sell off our airlines and communications as well as let private enterprise take up competitive positions against previous public monopolies. While public enterprise under capitalism is a very long way from the socialised ownership of the means of production and distribution we require for building a genuine socialist country, these organisations are held dear to the hearts of thinking workers and offer some relief from the avarice of capitalist exploitation. We need to understand what is happening to these public enterprises as well as struggle to prevent their sacrifice to the money lenders.

The first question that must be answered is whether these occurrences are some new manifestation or just a reaffirmation of the true nature of capitalism? I would assert that it is an old story being retold from a new book and I think it is important to indicate why we should look at some of its more interesting manifestations.

There are always explanations arguing the “new” nature of the situation but this is usually far from the case. In fact, the driving forces for deregulation were discovered by Marx and Engels more than a century ago.

Capitalism is driven by certain immutable laws and in this case they should not be forgotten. For example, as an enterprise continues to operate, it will suffer from a fall in profits unless it can find new areas to exploit. This is inherent in the growth of transnationals as they continue the monopolisation process. It is also the motivation behind capitalist ventures into the new enterprise opportunities in Eastern Europe. So it is no revelation that business is chasing opportunities world-wide in “information technology”.

Another aspect of capitalist production is the drive to introduce new methods into production. This became evident in the industrial revolution with the struggle over the introduction of technology like the power loom. Although this led to unprecedented strife, mass unemployment and the destruction of new machinery by the Luddites, new technology came to stay.

Ever since that time, capital has introduced new technologies when they were

created, providing it served their economic or political interests. It is one of the reasons why capitalism has generally outstripped socialism in applying the scientific and technological revolution (STR).

The basic characteristics of capitalist production, which have not changed since its birth, are the driving forces behind the deregulation and privatisation of telecommunications, air transport and other public enterprises in Australia.

The role of social democracy

The recent Special Federal Conference of the ALP and its decisions on privatisation are a continuation of Accord politics and reflect the relationship to the underlying character of the changes occurring in capitalist production. To view the ALP decisions as the motive force is to miss the difference between what causes the change and what is used to implement change.

Since its inception, the ALP has sought to be a reformer of capitalism. Any pretense at real social change was left in the dust at Barcaldine although a valiant minority have tried unceasingly to change this.

The outcome of not challenging capitalism can only be to do its bidding, either reluctantly or enthusiastically. The ALP not only does not challenge but is deeply indebted to capital as well as being tied to capital by political and ideological strings. It receives much electoral funding from big business sources.

The nature of Western democracy today is such that its governments are there to implement the needs of capital. This means, as always, that power within capitalism does not lie with governments but with capital itself. Elections, inquiries and government decisions are but a veneer over the real decision processes and power. The interests of capital now require the expansion and exploitation of information technology.

Why Telecom?

The question *why Telecom?* needs to be answered.

It is necessary to understand why the public monopoly came into being in the first place. Telecom, Australia Post, the railways and other public enterprise came into being because the costs of providing these services were prohibitive and likely profits were nil. Capital, therefore, required the government to provide the infrastructure.

The present change has come through the scientific and technological revolution. Some of these services now represent a huge source of profit which can be exploited for private profit. Information technology is a major commodity world wide.

Despite the achievements of public enterprise as a universal provider, the pressure is on to remove the profitable areas of the services and hand them over to private enterprise in disregard of national interests. The privatisation agenda is clear: make way for the exploitation of new opportunities!

But what is the likely outcome? What has happened overseas will also happen here.

Results of privatisation overseas

US air safety

While the main thoughts of this article are developed around the question of communications and their deregulation, another area of deregulation, air transport, has some interesting similarities.

One theme currently being proffered by Dick Smith, the head of civil aviation in Australia, is that we are overdoing the question of air safety and that we can deliver a better grade of service to air travelers by reducing our safety standards.

During a recent visit, the former head of the US civil aviation authority revealed at a media conference that this was the attitude of the authority in the lead up to deregulation in the United States.

This expert revealed how this misconception has worked in the US. He indicated that the immediate result of deregulation was fierce competition and lower prices for air travelers but just as fast as the prices came down, the problems began to appear.

The first measurement of air safety is, of course, the number of crashes per planes in the air. With the ongoing advance of aircraft technology, the rate of crashes and failures had been dropping exponentially. Upon deregulation, the figures in the US indicated that this natural increase in safety was immediately halted, the rate of crashes increased due to two main considerations.

Firstly, the cut throat competition led to cutbacks in maintenance — exactly what Dick Smith has advocated. Secondly, the increase in planes in the air through competition meant that the qualifications and experience of pilots decreased. For example, the former head of US civil aviation indicated that the terrible crash we saw on TV a few years back with the plane in the icy waters of the Potomac river would never have been crewed by such junior flight officers before deregulation.

One can quickly draw a parallel between airline deregulation and the problems plaguing the bus industry in Australia with company failures and horrific crashes the result of capitalist competition.

US communications

On January 1, 1984, the telephone system in the USA was broken up into a multitude of companies in the name of greater competition and efficiency. Prior to 1984, the system was dominated by American Telephones and Telegraphs (AT&T), "*The Bell System*" or "*Ma Bell*".

Bell Telephone had to divest itself of its 22 operating companies and others were allowed into the market.

The results have been interesting. In the 50 years up to 1984, the real cost of a telephone service declined by 60 per cent. However, in 1984 alone, telephone bills for local services increased by an average of 17.1 per cent.

The long distance call has become a nightmare on two counts. Firstly, companies can no longer provide end to end service. Your local company provides the phone connection, another company or companies provide the long distance connection and yet another provides the local connection at the other end.

This is a similar situation to shifting goods by rail interstate in Australia where you must trans-ship goods at the borders because of non-standard gauges. Every trans-shipment puts on more costs. In the US, some companies are only there to provide connections on lucrative routes and they must be used by law. Some efficiency!

When AT&T provided these services end to end, there were no multiple billing and special dialing codes — a much simpler and efficient system.

Thirdly, in the US, like Australia at present, *Ma Bell* cross-subsidised less profitable areas of operation — the rural sector (small farmers) and local services (used by the poor, unemployed, sick and elderly). This ceased in 1984 with the break-up of Bell Telephone and, in its place, special standard services called Lifeline and Lin-kup were set up for the disadvantaged.

This has been an unmitigated failure. The administration costs for means-testing alone are such that the amount it costs to assess the discount is more than the discount granted. An estimate of the numbers requiring these services is about 11 million of which three million are not connected, six million are still on normal rates and two million are receiving relief. This is after six years.

A final point about deregulation in the US. The Communications Workers of America claim that there are no longer any residential phones in use that were made in the US. The new companies form joint ventures with Asian companies and have the manufacturing done in Asia for cheaper wages. AT&T had a commitment to local manufacture just like Telecom has at the moment.

British Telecom

There are many similarities between Australia and Great Britain. In Britain the government licensed a second network competitor against the existing monopoly. The stated intention was to give the British public lower prices and higher quality. Sound familiar?

The stated aims included a government regulation authority to ensure a level playing field between the competitors. Only one competitor was licensed to ensure that there would not be a slide towards competition only in the lucrative markets. Employee shareholdings and a shareholders organisation to ensure shares would not become concentrated in the hands of banks and other financial institutions were introduced.

All of these were admirable aims but all were a failure. The overriding rules of accumulation of capital ensured this. Subsequent events have born this out.

The privatised British Telecom has had to continue to supply universal service and the competitor Mercury has not. Mercury's license only requires it to provide service where it is economically viable and this has been in the major city centres and the connections between them.

British Telecom shares soon became monopolised in the hands of the rich, the workers having off-loaded them for cash and accumulation taking care of the rest.

The cost structure has changed with services in the city centres under hot competition and British Telecom's shortfall in income and resultant cost increases being transferred to residential services in two ways — increased prices and

reduced services.

Service performance in telecommunications can be measured in a number of ways — a company's performance against its own targets, measured improvements year to year, the number of customer complaints, customer opinion surveys and comparison between companies.

OFTEL, the British regulatory body, reported that in 1988 British Telecom had the best year for quality of service and that complaints were the same as for 1987. On closer scrutiny, however, it also revealed that in 1987 there had been a 70 per cent increase in complaints over 1986, so 1988 must have been still 70 per cent worse than 1986 for service quality. British Telecom was privatised in 1984 and Mercury was licensed in the same year.

There are a lot of similarities in the Australian government's proposals and promises. What happened in Great Britain is fair warning of the ultimate consequences here.

Canada

Canada has over 100 local Telecom companies. They have an equivalent grade of service to ourselves but there are differences. For example, they provide free local calls as well as party lines in some areas. (Telecom has eliminated party lines in Australia).

Free local calls are not all they seem. As Milton Freidman pointed out, there is no such thing as a free lunch, someone has to pay. In Canada free calls only exist within the area of the local exchange. Vancouver has 20 local exchanges and calls between them range from 6 to 24 cents a minute with a 20 cents connection charge.

Presently, Canada has all its Telecom companies organised into "Telecommunications Canada". This organisation sets the charges for long distance communications, and no one company can undercut these rates so competition is held in check. But like everywhere else, this is under review and likely to change this year.

The result of "free competition" in the long distance market in Canada will be the same as in the UK and the US. Valuable earnings from long distance calls will not be available to subsidise the costlier local operations, with a resultant price increase and downgraded service.

At this point, it may have become clear that the installation and maintenance of long haul equipment is far cheaper than that of local exchange switching. This point is crucial to the question before us.

Communications were supplied everywhere on the basis of universal service. As a result of the predominate use of long distance by big business and its relative cheapness these days, it is the prime target for deregulation.

The essence of the debate centres around cheaper telecommunications for big business, new areas of exploitation for private enterprise and their resultant divestiture of previously publicly owned utilities to private enterprise directly or indirectly.

Likely results in Australia

In his speech to Parliament on November 8, Bob Hawke outlined his government's plans for deregulation of communications and transport, based on the deci-

sions of the Special Federal Labor Conference that reversed the Labor Party's policy. He made it clear that the government was pleased with the measures introduced in 1987 and 1988 which opened competition in customer equipment and value-added services.

He spelt out what the government is planning and what it will guarantee. Aussat will be sold and be the base for the new competitor who will have unrestricted rights to provide all telecommunication services. It will be up and running before the end of 1991. Telecom's representatives on the Aussat board have to resign immediately and the government will purchase Telecom's shareholding in Aussat at its October 24, 1990 value.

The new competitor will interconnect to the Telecom/OTC network at a price that allows Telecom/OTC to recover costs incurred in providing facilities to the competitor and to underpin community service obligations.

Regulatory safeguards will ensure the competitor equal access to national and international services (it is not clear whether "equal access" means 50 per cent access). Telecom/OTC will be subjected to separate price caps for local, interstate and international services which could mean no cross subsidy of services. Telecom/OTC also has to ensure that it carries and completes calls without Quality Diminution and provides other services like directories and billing. Financial transaction are to be transparent, that is, one bill per service.

The government intends this duopoly to last until 1997 when there will be open competition.

A third competitor besides Telecom/OTC and Aussat will be allowed into the mobile phones market and this market will be further opened in 1995.

Austel, the regulatory body, will be given extended powers and take on some of Telecom's functions to police and enforce deregulation. This includes arbitration of interconnection charges, control of numbers, acting as Australia's representative for international standards, preventing misuse of market power and reporting to the government annually. In short, Austel will police Telecom/OTC.

A further aspect is the ability to resell capacity. If, for example, a bank buys more communications than it needs, it can resell it to a third party, thereby introducing another aspect of privatisation.

The government will ensure that the community's expectations are met and is claiming that prices will fall across a range of services, that there will be no timed local calls to households, and that rural and remote services will be maintained. On careful examination, however, it becomes clear that the government has built a careful plan.

No timed local calls? The full bite of deregulation is planned in two steps so timed local calls will not surface until after complete deregulation in 1997.

Prices falling in real terms across a range of services? But there are no promises on the price of a basic service.

Rural and remote services to remain? But the government will place controls over how Telecom charges and says the competitor will have to contribute to universal service obligations. "Over time", however, this will get lost in the mists of time and political manoeuvring.

Airlines

The government is to sell 100 per cent of Australian Airlines and 49 per cent of Qantas. At the same time, it will lift the limits on foreign investment in domestic airlines to 40 per cent and Qantas to 35 per cent. This will be coupled with the opening up of international access in the area of freight.

These developments mean that foreign capital will be invested in domestic and international airlines and the skies will be opened to freight and charter competition. This means profits for overseas airlines, profits for overseas investors as well as interest payments for overseas finance.

Initially, the cheaper fares will be a boon but the greater competition will lead to lower standards. Already Qantas has closed its engineering operations in Sydney and, for some time, has had its major maintenance done in Ireland by Air Lingus.

The price of a cheap airfare will last as long as it did in the interstate bus industry.

The process of deregulation, privatisation and outright sale of public assets comes about because capitalism must continue to expand or perish. It must ensure that every technical development is put to profit and not just use, and that whenever publicly supplied utilities come of age profit-wise, they are handed to private enterprise.

The Media in Australia

by Bill Briggs

As the crisis in the socialist world deepens, as problems become more acute, so does our mass media turn up the heat, with all manner of heart rending tales from the Soviet Union. Among the more recent offerings have been the resurrection of rather tired old jokes about the newspapers *Izvestia* (News) and *Pravda* (Truth). They are generally variations on the theme that there is no truth in *Izvestia* and very little news in *Pravda*. Its aim is to make us feel relieved to be living in a country which enjoys a free press. It also takes some of the sting out of the difficulties which are a reality for many in Australia today.

But what is the picture of the media in this country? One does not need to be a rocket scientist to work out that for years our mass media has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The events themselves are reported — Murdoch's morning and evening papers in Melbourne and Sydney being merged, talks between the ABC and private media interests involved in pay-TV, the collapse of Warwick Fairfax and the financial problems of commercial TV channels.

But, there is not a great deal of analysis in our "free press". After all, who among mainstream editors will be so bold as to ask tricky questions about the state of the media in this country? Who on Murdoch's payroll is going to be courageous enough to question the voice of the master? Who on Packer's staff is prepared to follow the *Bulletin* editor into the nether world by printing questionable pieces about the great man?

And so we, the poor consumer of the media, must do one of two things — either accept the shifting face of reality as presented by the media giants and not question things, or prod and poke about for alternatives and other voices in order to try and work out what is what.

The term "*media*" gets bandied about with rare abandon. Just what do we mean by the term — what is this beast, the media? We understand the term to mean the delivery of information by either print or electronic forms — press, radio, television. We understand the term "information" to be news, current affairs, facts and opinion about many issues.

Entertainment

However, the media also has an entertainment capacity. We have seen in recent years a tendency for the news to be sold to the consumer and packaged as more

of an entertainment. The intrusive, voyeuristic use of the electronic media has been well documented and discussed. As our culture becomes more closely associated with that of the United States and more closely linked to a consumer society and commercialised culture, this peep-show reporting of events has increased.

While much could be said of the pure entertainment aspects of the media, it is as well to focus primarily on the conveyance of news and the presentation of ideas — the moulding of opinion which characterises our “free press” and electronic media.

The two wings are closely linked — *opinions* are moulded and formed from the mass culture of television. *Wants* are artificially created and attitudes formed to all manner of questions by the popular television programs we are exposed to. However, what of the packaging of news and who is it for?

It might be something of a truism to make the comment that the media is an educator. Who then is being educated — who is the real target audience and what is the message being taught?

The answer to these questions lies in the fact that education as such is provided to serve the interests of whoever is in charge. In this case it means that the media is there to serve the class interests of capital.

The mass media is owned by capital and, of course, will promote capitalism. It targets those who make up the great mass of society — the working people and, in particular, those who see themselves as part of the “middle class”. The whole advertising abomination is a proof of this.

The message presented on our screens and in our newspapers is simple enough — the *status quo* is pretty terrific but out there are nameless, faceless enemies who would take our freedoms away. And so, in a none to subtle way, we are given this message and have it reinforced in a never ending barrage.

It is possibly a little naive to suggest that we should have, or be able to have, a better media. If it is to promote the *status quo*, how can it be other than what it is? This does not mean that people cannot successfully strive for a more objective, more democratic press.

ABC

But then there is the ABC — a broadcaster with a record which has more in common with the ideals of objectivity and democracy. It is publicly owned and has often been a thorn in the sides of those who would distort. Its future is not bright but how does an organisation like the ABC fit the pattern of controlled and controlling media?

The history of the ABC has many bright points. It has a proud history of reporting things which need to be said about political institutions, corruption, excesses of capital and so on. But the history of the ABC cannot be seen in isolation from the history of the country as a whole and the economic realities of the day.

The ABC as a television outlet was born in days which were economically healthy for capitalism. Across the country and across the Western world there was a heady optimism in the capitalist economies. In the 1950s and early 1960s the ABC grew. They were good times for capital and a certain level of criticism could be tolerated. Safety valves were quite acceptable.

More recently there have been repeated calls for the corporatisation of the ABC as a potential forerunner to privatisation. We have heard repeated talk of advertising, of developing levels of sponsorship and have witnessed a gradual shrinking of government subsidies from which the national programmer has to meet its expenditures.

This is not only a reflection of the troubles the economy is now facing. The ABC is increasingly being presented as a luxury which an embattled economy is unable to realistically afford. The fact that this is a nonsense is immaterial to the arguments of those who are concerned with ensuring that the questioning nature of the ABC be curtailed in times of severe attacks on living standards. It is immaterial to those who see the opportunity of turning a profit from a tame and domesticated ABC.

Murdoch and monopoly

We have a highly concentrated media ownership with the tiniest handful of proprietors in control. They are among the worst specimens of media proprietors seen anywhere in the world. Indeed the concentration of the media in Australia is only topped by that of Ireland.

One of Bob Hawke's "favourite sons", Rupert Murdoch, has been in town recently trying to shore up some deficiencies in his empire. His activities served to highlight a number of problems and perspectives facing the media monopolies in Australia. Murdoch has, for a long time, had his avaricious sights set on gobbling up the empire of another media giant — the Fairfax papers. Owning 60 per cent of Australian metropolitan daily newspapers is not enough for Murdoch.

The merging of the Sydney *Telegraph* and *Mirror* into the *Telegraph Mirror* and the Melbourne *Herald* and *Sun* into the *Herald Sun* may well help him get around the laws on foreign ownership yet again, as he did when he took over the *Herald and Weekly Times* group. The fact that he is prepared to shed hundreds of thousands of sales makes the situation even more interesting. The two Sydney papers had a combined circulation of 643,000 but the new paper has a projected circulation of 480,000. The Melbourne papers were selling 736,000 copies but the combined paper will have an estimated 600,000 customers.

By these mergers, Murdoch hopes to cut some of the debts he has amassed. His News Corp has a debt of \$10 billion. Murdoch's chief rival, Kerry Packer, while being the country's richest man, has some interesting debt problems as well.

The debt situation is only part of the picture as these giants of capital go about their manipulative business. The golden days of the print media are fading. The circulation of the Melbourne *Herald*, for example, shows a drop of some 200,000 in the past 20 years, despite a considerable increase of population in the period.

But how worrying is this to the media proprietors and to the rest of the Australian ruling class? The quality of the printed media has long been in decline. This is not just a question of a drop in standards among journalists or of a growing lack of integrity. It has gone hand in hand with a general decline in the quality of education. How "clever" a public does capital require today anyway?

The concentration of the press into so few hands, has contributed to the current situation which sees the syndication of news. It matters little whether you are reading a paper in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane or Hobart. The international news is

also syndicated through such agencies as AAP, Reuters, AP, The Independent, etc. The same opinion-heavy item will appear before you. Only the cartoon will change and only the day you read it will alter. We are getting the world as seen through the eyes of fewer and fewer commentators and this is most disturbing.

The situation with the television industry is even worse. What could have been a medium for information dissemination with a potential to develop critical analysis has become one endless round of Jana Wendt-style opinion-moulding presentations in which the really incisive questions are not asked. The television news can only be delivered to our screens if there are good pictures to accompany it. If not it may get a passing reference. And if it does not give the opportunity for a good dose of voyeurism, then forget it.

Given all this, it matters little that fewer people are reading newspapers. They are getting the message as never before. What is worse, the consumption of the media's message takes place without any active participation on the part of the consumer. This passive acceptance of none too subtle messages consolidates the grip the state and its captains have over society.

Attacks on the autonomy of bodies such as the ABC are to be expected. The slide is likely to be a gradual disintegration as the strengthened hand of the profit motive is forced upon the few remaining independent media organs. People of the ilk of David Hill have not been recruited to head the ABC by accident. He has a commitment to ease the ABC into the corporate sphere while the consumer is being prepared by continual reminders that money is tight. The government's policy towards the ABC is, however, just as much a political as an economic one. There are those who want to see the independence of the ABC limited, or better still, see the service handed over to private enterprise.

To predict the future is always a dangerous occupation, but the signs are fairly clear in this game of monopoly. A thinking, discerning population capable of analysing events is a prospect that makes the leaders of capital awaken in a cold sweat. An acquiescent, ignorant, consuming society is more to their liking and that is what capital is doing its best to create.

An alternative media voice has to be struggled for, cherished and nurtured. At the same time the independence of the ABC must be protected.

Alienation

The Worm in the Apple

by Vic Williams

Alienation is a worm eating into the apple of production, into society and human relations. Its influence is difficult to measure and can only be guessed at, both under capitalism as well as its extent under socialism.

Karl Marx dealt with alienation as a social and economic fact and as a phenomenon of social consciousness. In the production process, as the wage worker produces for the capitalist, Marx sees the act of alienation in two aspects. The first is "the relationship of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object dominating him". (*Writings of Young Marx*, Anchor Books, 1967. p 292)

Marx was the first to show that when the worker was paid wages for his labour power, the value of what he produced was in excess of or surplus to the value of the wages paid. The surplus value was retained by the capitalist as profit, to be re-invested in capital that further dominated the worker. This inevitably led to over-production for the market, for the main market in industrialised countries are the workers who produce considerably more than their wages can buy.

"Capital necessarily tends towards an increase in the productivity of labour, and as great a diminution of necessary labour." The increasing use of science and automation that Marx foresaw means that this tendency must put more and more pressure on the worker.

"The knowledge that obliges the inanimate parts of the machine, through its construction, to work appropriately as an automaton, does not exist in the consciousness of the worker, but acts upon him through the machine as an alien force, as the power of the machine itself."

"In large scale production by machines, any relationship of the product to the direct requirements of the producer disappears, as does any immediate use value." (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Paladin, 1973. pp 155, 156)

Because of this alienation, the worker has no personal interest in the quantity and quality of what he produces. The capitalists are aware of this and how it affects production. They have long used the contract system, paying workers according to production: the darg for miners, shearers paid by the number of sheep shorn, fruit pickers by basket or tonne. It is not possible to apply it widely individually in factories in mass production or on the conveyor belt. Now, in Australia, the capitalists

have been able to insert the principle of productivity into decisions of wage levels as a means of speed-up.

The capitalists have employed industrial psychologists to find ways to overcome the effects of alienation and so increase production. Their research does not focus on alienation but examines job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The two are not synonymous but the research can provide useful insights into the level and effects of alienation.

William Morris, one of the first scientific socialists in England, an employer of more than 100 men in his factory, saw this loss: "I could not do anything to give this pleasure (in creative initiative) to the workman, because I should have had to change their method of work so utterly that I would have disqualified them from earning their living elsewhere. You see I have got to understand thoroughly the manner of work under which the art of the Middle Ages was done, only to discover that it is impossible to work in that manner in this profit-grinding society."

Division of labour

The division of labour is an important factor in the loss of satisfaction. Marx wrote in *Capital*: "It is not only the labour that is divided, subdivided and portioned out between divers men; it is the man himself that is cut up, and metamorphosed into the automatic spring of an exclusive operation."

"The knowledge, the judgement and the will which, though in ever so small a degree, are practised by the independent peasant or handicraftman ... those faculties are now required only for the workshop as a whole."

T Wise in *Human Relations in Modern Industry* sums up: "It is a terrible thought to realise that much of present day work is inherently incapable of satisfying the man who does it — and it is getting worse with the increase of machines."

Henry Clay Smith, in *Psychology of Industrial Behaviour*, gives figures. In some English factories, when there was only one operation of work, only 33 per cent were fairly interested. Among executives, 92 per cent found the job interesting but only 54 per cent of factory workers. In six firms in Michigan, 11 per cent of executives were dissatisfied, 48 per cent highly satisfied. Of the unskilled workers, 27 per cent were dissatisfied.

Gilmer, in *Industrial Psychology*, found job dissatisfaction very high among young workers, going down to the lowest at about 30 and rising steadily to a middle aged revolt. He found 25 per cent of unskilled workers dissatisfied. In 14 out of 26 studies, he found that workers with positive attitudes to the job showed higher productivity than those with a negative attitude. Nine studies showed no reaction. Only three of the studies showed workers with a negative attitude to work produced more.

The other aspect of alienation noted by Marx was: "The relationship of labour to the act of production in labour. This relationship is that of the worker to his own activity as alien and not belonging to him." For the worker: "It is entirely incidental and unessential whether the producer immediately enjoys and needs his product and whether his activity, the action of labour itself, is his self-satisfaction and the realisation of his rational disposition and spiritual aims."

"The fact is that labour is external to the labourer — that it is not a part of nature

— and the worker does not affirm himself in his work but denies himself, feels miserable and unhappy, develops no free physical or mental energy but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. His work, therefore, is not voluntary but coerced, forced labour.”

“His activity therefore appears as torment, his own creation a force alien to him, his wealth as poverty, the essential bond connecting him with other men as something unessential so that the separation from other men appears as his true existence.”

“A direct consequence of man’s alienation from the product of his work, from his life activity and from his species existence, is the alienation of man from man.”

Money relationship

The worker’s relationship to his employer and to the other workers is a money relationship that is based on mistrust of man for man. The capitalists make use of this by variations of pay for differences of skills, of sex, of seniority, of race to divide the interests of workers.

Alienation is a phenomenon of social consciousness, with the degree of understanding by the worker of his alienation changing with his personal and social experiences. The pride of the craftsman in his skill and in the product of his work, which are a foundation of his confidence and character, are no longer evident in the worker in mass industry whose interest in the work process has been destroyed by alienation. The more ingenious the work process, the less intelligent is the work required and the more acute the individual’s alienation from the whole. As the division of labour makes a man’s role more partial, so his field of vision becomes more limited.

American writer Harvey Swados took a job at a Ford plant for experience and wrote: “Almost without exception, the men with whom I worked in the assembly line last year felt like trapped animals. Depending on their age and personal circumstances, they were either resigned to their fate, furiously angry with themselves for what they were doing, or desperately hunting other work.”

In his book *We Need You*, the West German writer Gunter Wallraff wrote of his experiences in two years of factory work: “At the end of eight hours I feel like a squeezed lemon ... I don’t know anyone here and I’ve no idea what they do. I’m dead tired at the end of the shift. And I nearly fall asleep standing in the packed bus. At home, it takes me hours to relax. The monotonous work dulls my senses more and more.”

The scientific and technological revolution, the automation in capitalist industries is further increasing the dissatisfaction, the injuries, the mental ill-effects among workers. There is no solution under capitalism to the economic, social and psychological effects of alienation.

Union activity

But workers do not only go slow or become despondent because of job dissatisfaction, they become militant, organise unions and go on strike. Industrial psychologists Finlay, Sartain and Tate found that where men had no opportunity of self-expression or creativeness in their work, there was a willingness of many union members to contribute time and energy to union affairs as officers and committee

men, strong evidence of the urge to be recognised as an individual and someone of importance.

Ross Stagner digs deeper. He “does not believe men go into picket lines and endanger their lives in bloody violence for the mere wage increase or shorter hours. Behind every blow in a strike, days, months, years of hurt feelings, resentment bitter and strong because it expresses the very will to live”.

Both the economic impact of alienation and the social consciousness it creates can combine into opposition to the wages system, to capital. They play their part in the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement with socialism.

But the same workers who have changed the social system have only partly changed themselves. They carry with them the scars, the virus of alienation from the past.

Joe Slovo, in his pamphlet *Has Socialism Failed?*, shows how alienation can continue and develop under socialism: “The transfer of legal ownership of productive property from private capital to the state does not, on its own, create fully socialist relations of production, not does it always significantly change the work-life of the producer. The power to control the producer’s work-life and to dispose of the product of labour is now in the hands of a ‘committee’ rather than a board of directors. And if the ‘committee’ separates itself from the producers by a bureaucratic wall without democratic accountability, its role is perceived no differently from that of the board of directors. It remains a force over which the producer has no real control and which (despite the absence of economic exploitation of the capitalist variety) dominates him as an alien power.”

“Under capitalism economic compulsion sanctified by the role of capital (threatened unemployment, etc) plays an important part in providing the ‘incentives’ for rising productivity despite alienation by workers from products of their labour.... Under socialism guaranteed employment and the amount of remuneration did not always depend upon quality, productivity or efficiency, opening the way to parasitism at the point of production.” (*African Communist*, No 121, p 42, 43)

Under these conditions, the alienation in socialist countries can result in big losses in production, both in quality and quantity. It can also affect the attitude of people to the social system, can weaken and undermine it.

Role of the state

Miklos Almasi of Budapest University, in an article “Alienation and Socialism” (in *Marxism and Alienation*, Humanities Press, 1965) deals with the problem. He looks at an essential factor that gave rise to alienation under socialism: the one-sided exaggeration of the role of the state:

“In the one-sided system of instruction from above, minimum scope was left to individual initiative and individual decision. The workers and local leaders — foremen, managers — faded into mere executors of instructions. The rigid, one-sided treatment of the objective laws of economic planning put a brake on initiative from below, on the elan of labour, and greatly contributed to apathy and indifference — the groundstones of alienation. With the one-sided use of moral and ideological motives, material incentives were relegated to the background.” (*Marxism and Alienation*, p 126)

Almasi examined the division of labour, both under capitalism and socialism, as a most important source of alienation. Under socialism the alienating effect of the system of roles caused by the division of labour still makes itself felt. The worker “is at the mercy of some unwieldy machine largely incomprehensible to him”. Almasi looks to a solution to the problem of the technical industrial development in the reforming of the social organisation and the social powers of the individual.

Almasi writes of the effect of division of labour on people that “under capitalism this internal disruption, the dissolution of integrity is extreme: people lose the kernel of their personality”. But something of the same can happen from alienation under socialism. How much of the disruption and disorientation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are the effects of alienation?

Almasi is confident that alienation can be ended under socialism. He points to the last writings of Lenin:

“The essence of Lenin’s train of thought and policy is that the alienating effect of the division of labour can be defeated by developing the natural social components of human activities, and transforming the millions into ‘makers of society’. It can be seen that for Lenin alienation was not a question of technical development but a problem of social practice and the shaping of consciousness ... if the worker has the opportunity to shape the organisational conditions in his work, if he can on some level have a say in the production of the goods he manufactures, in the policy and economy of his plant, the shaping of his own conditions of living — then the effect of alienation is immediately reduced.... Personal participation in the wider connections — effective social action — frees man from alienation.” (p 132)

“Liquidation of alienation is one of the most fundamental historic missions of socialism. Without the liquidation of alienation it is not possible to realise the society worthy of man ‘communism’.”

The problem of overcoming the effect of alienation by the working class movement is an immediate one. Alienation may generate militancy but workers may also be overwhelmed by alienation, defeated, disorganised and so more difficult to draw into working class struggle.

Transition to socialism

In the first stage of the transition to socialism, the understanding of and struggle against alienation becomes even more urgent, for in that stage the transitional government and society must be able to increase its production and its social coherence to give the masses confidence that the standard of living and way of social life can be and is being improved.

Alienation is a social phenomenon that needs much more study and investigation by Marxists so that we can have an understanding of how to overcome it.

New Struggles for a New decade

by Ray Ferguson
SPA Queensland State Secretary

As we move into the last decade of the 20th century, tremendous changes are sweeping the world. Governments in some socialist countries have collapsed, while others are strengthening and consolidating their socialist systems. In some respects, imperialism has been strengthened although it is, at the same time, suffering economic defeats and setbacks. Old ideas are being challenged, new forms of struggle are emerging.

The struggle for world peace has undergone a quantitative change. Armies are being dispersed and nuclear warheads dismantled. At the recent summit meetings between President Gorbachev and President Bush, new initiatives were adopted for the further dismantling of nuclear missiles, for cutbacks in chemical weapons and improvements in trade relations between the Soviet Union and the United States.

However, despite these positive developments, we would be remiss to think that US imperialism has undergone a qualitative change in its basic economic and foreign policies or in its world outlook.

The declarations by US leaders and others of opposition to aggression in connection with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait are nothing but arrant hypocrisy coming from those who ruthlessly, and with considerable loss of life, invaded Panama just 12 months ago and still occupy that country.

The real reason for the US actions in the Middle East is to be found in the intentions of the US rulers to regain control of the oil resources of the area and, through that control, to impose their domination of the whole world.

Another aim is to smash, once and for all, the Arab national liberation movements which have for decades fought to win national independence for the Arab people and control over their natural oil resources.

While the Soviet Union is reducing its military forces at Cam Ranh Bay, the US continues to maintain and upgrade its 500 military facilities in Asia and the Pacific with thousands of nuclear warheads and new cruise missiles. US maritime strategy is geared to an early escalation to nuclear weapons in the event of a war breaking out.

As a junior partner of US imperialism, and eager to develop its own growing influence, Australia's foreign policy is becoming increasingly militarist in character and is extending its horizons.

In its new role as the South Pacific policeman, Australia is fast becoming a major naval power in the region, with a new generation of submarines and surface ships. As well as increasing tensions in the region, much needed resources are being diverted to a growing domestic military-industrial complex.

Over recent times, our Party has given close attention to the Asia-Pacific region. We have established new contacts and strengthened our relations with fraternal parties and other progressive forces.

We need to continue this activity and support policies that will assist in the region becoming a zone of peace, with trade relations based on the principles of mutual benefit.

Build the peace movement

Building the peace movement is necessary at all times but the increasingly unstable and dangerous international situation makes this again an urgent task. It is important to draw conclusions about the international situation based on reality. In this respect suggestions that "the cold war is over" are unrealistic and unacceptable.

The movement for world peace has been built and strengthened on the mass mobilisation of millions of people, with the aim of preventing a nuclear holocaust. This mighty force helped to influence governments and push back the warmongers.

The historical experiences of the 1917 Revolution and the rapid rise and achievements of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries marked a qualitative change in the global balance of forces and was a major factor in the preservation of peace in Europe and in other parts of the world as well.

However, millions of dollars continue to be spent every minute on armaments, while environmental and developmental problems are neglected. Some may still think that a nuclear war is winnable. The dismantling of all weapons of mass destruction and the adoption of principles of non-aggression and equality between all nations still remain distant goals.

A significant influence in the world peace movement has been the peace policies of the communist and workers' parties, who have based their approach to the world situation on the Leninist principle of peaceful co-existence between countries having different social systems.

Peaceful co-existence

Peaceful co-existence has a number of component parts which constitute an integral whole. It recognises the necessity for conflicts and disputes between nations to be resolved peacefully, by negotiations and without war.

It is class-based and contains its own dimensions for responding to a changing world in which the balance of forces are altered, and which makes it impossible for the imperialist states to avoid entering into economic and political relations with the socialist states.

Peaceful co-existence has never meant a permanent division of the world into capitalist and socialist blocs and does not mean the surrender of the rights of nations to self-determination nor of people's rights to struggle for democracy and socialism.

Today this principle is being challenged. It is said to be outdated and that the concept of universal human values is more relevant in a changing world.

Presented as new thinking, it is argued that the peace struggle is no longer a class issue, that the preservation of human life, as a universal human value, takes precedence over other considerations and that recognition of this will lead to nuclear disarmament.

Some other long-established Marxist-Leninist principles are also claimed to be outdated and are being challenged.

To build and consolidate a socialist society is a challenging and complex task. Difficulties were bound to be experienced and changes needed to be implemented — new methods of production introduced, ideological work strengthened, socialist democracy developed.

However, such changes should strengthen the all round socialist planned economy with a predominance of public ownership and further develop socialist democracy against bourgeois concepts.

Some of the socialist countries are proceeding in this direction. In some others this has not been the case. Errors have been made in developing the productive forces, in estimating the socialist consciousness of the people and the standing of the Party.

In attempting to implement the necessary changes, these weaknesses were revealed and manipulated by anti-socialist forces. As a result, some communist parties have been thrown out of office while others have capitulated and are no longer applying Leninist principles.

A planned economy is essential for socialism because it brings into balance and can regulate the factors of production and distribution. Any weakening or abandonment of socialist state planning can only bring about severe contradictions within a socialist economy. All the socialist countries which have weakened or abandoned central planning and are relying on the so-called "market forces" have already found themselves in deep trouble.

Related to all these questions is the promotion of the convergence theory. This is not a new phenomenon but is being revived in the new conditions.

The theory is that by converging the two systems of capitalism and socialism a third way can be found and, with it, the creation of a new socio-economic system which will take the best of both worlds. Instead of socialism superseding capitalism as part of the class struggle, the two systems with merge.

Our Party has taken a firm stand in opposition to these anti-Leninist, non-class positions. In our defence of socialism and Leninist principles, we have rejected revisionism and maintain that freedom and democracy are class questions, that class struggle is about power and that proletarian internationalism is not negotiable.

We defend the leading role of the Party and assert that the vanguard role of the

Party remains a basic pre-requisite for a socialist revolution and the building of a socialist society.

World revolutionary movement

The validity of the concept that the world revolutionary forces are made up of three components is continuously being strengthened.

The dialectical link between the socialist countries, the working class in the developed capitalist countries and the national liberation movements, which constitute the world revolutionary forces are bringing about change in many parts of the world. Their interaction and unity is essential.

In Africa, the revolutionary forces of the ANC and SWAPO, supported by the international solidarity of the world's working class, have inflicted heavy defeats on the South African racists and their repugnant apartheid system. Angola, supported by Cuban forces, inflicted an historic military defeat on the South African army.

In Central and Latin America, imperialism has suffered setbacks. Pinochet has been forced to step down. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua, despite their electoral setback, are working hard to hold onto the gains of their revolution.

Cuba maintains its firm commitment to socialism and proletarian internationalism. In the Middle East, the struggle of the Palestinian people remains a constant problem for imperialism. The Afghan people have prevented the military victory of the forces which are backed by the imperialist powers and the reactionary Arab regimes such as those of Saudi Arabia.

In Asia, the Indochinese nations remain firm to their socialist principles and are working collectively for an acceptable political solution to the problems of Cambodia.

However, despite these positive developments, socialism is facing a testing time. Already bourgeois historians are referring to socialism as an "aberration" of the 20th century, a "tragic mistake" of human development.

The international communist movement is under severe strain. Some parties have reassessed previously held positions on the grounds that they are outdated and no longer relevant in changing circumstances. At the same time there is a strong fight-back gathering momentum with parties thinking through the problems that have arisen and the reasons why the difficulties arose apparently so suddenly.

It was in these circumstances that the Socialist Party of Australia recently held a Special Congress. It enabled the Party membership to undertake a review of its ideas, work and experiences and to draw objective and realistic conclusions. These have been expressed in the Political Statement and other documents adopted by the Congress.

The Political Statement makes an analysis of some mistakes and errors that have been made in building socialism, leading to difficulties and setbacks in its short period of existence. But it also concludes that revolutionary change is inevitable and the setbacks will prove to be but a temporary period.

The Congress also drew some conclusions for our own work in Australia and above all, the necessity for all Party members and organisations to strengthen their connections with the working people. Our task is to uphold and build our own Party so that we can carry out our responsibilities in Australia.