became a political activist during the late 1960s and early '70s. The struggles of this period around Australian involvement in Viet Nam, draft resistance, feminism, apartheid, tenants' action, Aboriginal land rights and protection of the environment, helped to bring about changes in attitudes in Australian society as a whole.

These struggles were dominated by optimistic and idealistic politics. In an atmosphere of full employment, one could believe that if you fight boldly enough and shout loud enough you will win. I was aware that capitalism has many resources to maintain itself and that many people who criticise the system are not prepared to risk losing the security and identity it gives them. But those who said "the movement must have our leadership" or "you can't do that, you'll get arrested or alienate people", I thought were conservatives. I thought that marxists were among those followers of ideas that had failed.

The struggles of that period exposed how conservative many of those who called themselves marxist had become. The women's movement was particularly important in this respect. I gradually realised that many of the things thrown up by the movements of this period were essential to marxism, not contrary to it. For a start, marxism is about revolution, class struggle and organisation, and not about "theoretical practice". Successful tactics for socialism will not be based on analysing the limits placed on us by existing society. They will be based on an analysis of past and present from the point of view of the possibilities for a fundamentally different society.

Many marxists had repudiated stalinism — the substitution of leadership by the workers for leadership by the party, and the artificial division between socialism in the superstructure and the base. They recognised the distortions the hostile capitalist world and economic backwardness produced in the USSR and elsewhere. However, I felt that it must be a fundamental failure in marxism that led to lack of concern for the environment, democracy, workers' control, an end to sexism, and protection of human rights.

I thought the problem was Marx's economic determinism. To assert that production was the motive force in history seemed to make democratic questions secondary. This was illustrated by Lenin's argument in *The State and Revolution* that the state simply exists as an instrument of class rule, during the transitional stage of proletarian rule, over the remnants of bourgeois society. The state is directed at the class enemy and then, under socialism, when classes cease to exist, so will the state. My feeling was that the state couldn't just be defined away — institutions under capitalism developed in some ways independently and unevenly. They have an ability to survive even after the purpose and logic for their present form, the capitalist system, has gone. As the women's movement clearly demonstrated, the struggles for socialism to date have done very little to liberate women from their position as second class citizens. The same resilience applies to what Marx called commodity fetishism — the tendency to downgrade all relationships and achievements to their money value.

Similarly, many "marxists" argue that technology and science (like the family and the state) are neutral and that problems only arise because of misuse of science by the bourgeoisie. I felt that certain technologies were bad in that they made work meaningless or necessitated over-centralised control or had other undemocratic social features.

I came to realise that the view that production is the motive force in history is consistent with seeing democratic power, an end to sexism, and harmony with the environment as central to socialist struggle. The problem with the "marxist" views discussed above is that they are based on a narrow view of production. Marx explored the relationship between both subjective and objective factors — the aim was not to exclude the subjective. Capitalism not only leads to unfair distribution of wealth but it also holds back the productive and creative forces of society (e.g. all the waste, advertising and bad planning).
Marx identified an end to alienation from production through workers’ control at the workplace and locality as essential to socialism. Socialist economics is about democratic control and not just “ownership and distribution”.

I changed from an idealistic anarchist position to a marxist position only slowly. It was only after I took the arguments of feminists seriously and realised that they were criticisms of my own style and activity that I understood that the anarchist new left would not become a new theory and organisation free from capitalist habits. Not that becoming a marxist has freed me from sexism, as it was only after discussing this article with a woman friend that I acknowledged this factor. Being dissatisfied and unable to get a job with the politics I had been involved in, led me to leave Canberra and start work as a bus driver in 1976.

The managements of public transport systems have worked together with the roads lobby to make public transport less efficient. Public transport workers know how to run a better system. The task has been to put that alternative together and to encourage people’s confidence that improved public transport is worth struggling around.

Despite the fact that defence of working conditions depends upon defending public transport, it was difficult to get the issue taken seriously. Trad union militancy, when confined to traditional tactics around economic demands, doesn’t develop socialist consciousness. Rhetoric against the capitalist system from left leaders often gets a good reception during these struggles but there is no change in attitudes or actions. To change this, our strategy was — build an independent rank-and-file organisation, an informative and widely read rank-and-file publication, new tactics which challenged the employers’ rights (non-collection of fares, leaflets to passengers, ignore regulations), and build links with community and public transport action groups.

Often small struggles like breaking regulations by wearing a cardigan without a coat were more important than the big wages struggles in building confidence and challenging management prerogatives. Overall, the divisions between politics and unionism have been significantly broken down. This is essential to the development of socialist consciousness. Passengers and public transport workers are now seen to have some common interests. Today, it is the tramways union, not the employer, who is demanding to say where trams and buses should have right of way over cars. We want a say in implementing the ALP policy that the transport unions’ activity helped to create.

These experiences illustrate the importance of marxist concepts of workers’ democracy, control and intervention in breaking out of the capitalist constraints on trade union consciousness. They also show the importance of links between the trade union movement and the social movements in developing class and socialist consciousness. The key is to develop rank-and-file organisation to this end, and not just executive policy.

In my experience, a marxist party is necessary to avoid one’s world view being dominated by the ups and downs of day-to-day struggles which can lead to either disastrous conservatism or militancy. Also, in the development and education of militants, the trade union organisations are too dominated by capitalist values, and a revolutionary organisation is necessary. Without a political party it is hard to avoid vacillation between impotency caused by scorn of reforms and failure to develop socialist consciousness caused by embracing reforms and reformist goals.

Without a revolutionary party, struggles will remain isolated and will tend to lose connection with existing anti-capitalist traditions and forces.

One of the things that convinced me of the need for a political organisation armed with a scientific analysis of production was a study I made of the Broken Hill miners’ strike of 1919. The strike lasted for 18 months, the miners were politically organised, and hoped to inspire the formation of one class-conscious anti-capitalist union in Australia. The strike achieved the 30-hour week underground, and compensation for industrial diseases. Their syndicalist political aims were defeated by arbitration, trade union bureaucracy and the growth of world-wide capitalist organisation which could thwart a strategy for socialism based simply on trade union militancy. Syndicalism could not match the political power of the state aligned with international capital. In this case, the Hughes government and the Collins House group of companies, and their international financiers, were developing a cartel (to replace the Germans) for world control of lead and zinc. The government was a willing tool. Through the government, coded telegrams were sent at the beginning of 1919 from London to Australia asking that production be limited so as to maintain the lead price. The reply from Australia was that this could be done because industrial troubles were expected in May which was, in fact, when the great strike began. The progress of the dispute and its eventual settlement was closely related to fluctuations in the price of lead.

In the face of a recession generated by the multinationals and their relationship to governments, we need a scientific analysis, as well as commitment and organisation. Marxism and marxist organisation have this role to play.