appropriate objectives in particular circumstances: the shape of socialism is unlikely to be traceable in latter-day dogmas, any more than the general interests of capital are likely to be served by the proponents of a return to competitive capitalism.

So far I seem to have ignored the fact that 35 or 30 or 40% of the labour force are employees of the state and, especially, that large numbers of us are employed in the provision of health, education, social security, recreation facilities and so on. Many of the people involved devote enormous proportions of their energy to their jobs and have little left over to give effect to equality in sharing the care of home and family, let alone to be able to engage in local protest actions, the affairs of whatever party, union or organisation and swarming the numbers visible to TV cameras at rallies. Least of all is there energy for the development of socialist strategies. Our work is of value to others in the community but never unambiguously so. We must continuously seek to open the agencies for which we work to the needs and priorities of those people for whom the agencies ostensibly serve, to effect concomitant changes within those agencies, and to alert those people within whom we have contact through our jobs to the place of the agencies in the social order as we see it. While we are at it we might think with a considerable sense of urgency of how to open up the control of public enterprises, perhaps in part by breaking some of them into smaller enterprises, since there is little point in moving towards the public ownership of strategic industries while that signifies as it does at present, the impenetrability of an electricity commission.

Y
ears ago when I was young, members of the Eureka Youth League read and studied a series of texts which we thought was Marxian. While some studied Marx, the received message from the more simplified texts came to me like this:

Water when it boils turns to steam, therefore, in social life, when capitalism comes to the boil it will inevitably give way to socialism. The key word was inevitably. Such certainty informed millions of people around the world. It sustained many of them in the face of real adversity and, in my case, developed a confidence that even though the socialist project might be a long way off, it, like Christmas, would turn up.

I do not denigrate those who found the strength, partly through simplified theory, to develop the human will to move mountains. I admire the Vietnamese, and not just the Vietnamese, who received our support in the 60s and 70s. But in Australia such confidence was not only misplaced, it became an obstacle to social progress. There is nothing inevitable about socialism in Australia. It is to the credit of various Australian marxists, most of all to the communist party, that slowly and painfully they began to come to terms with some Australian realities. The task is by no means complete but the complexity of society and the difficulties embodied in changing society, institutions and ourselves, are better understood. That class conflict is inevitable is illustrated on a daily basis but it is not inevitable that such conflicts are resolved positively for the working people or according to any text-book solution.

One thing that is inevitable is that those engaged in the socialist movement today will not be around when people gather to consider Marx 200 years after his death. More to the point is whether anyone will then be around, that is, will the world and human society survive. Marx and his contemporaries could not have contemplated an important part of present day reality — the ever-present danger of nuclear war. Marx may have been less of an optimist if he could have foreseen that part of the pay-off in humanity's struggle to control nature is the existence of nuclear weapons.

It is to be another 100 years or even 10, a priority has to be given to achieving nuclear arms control leading to disarmament. This is not to suggest that everyone drop every other concern and concentrate on the disarmament movement. This would be an impossibility, not only because there are always pressing and immediate concerns, but because a force capable of achieving disarmament will only exist when it is connected to the everyday concerns of ordinary people.

In this connection, I believe that it ought to be recognised that almost everyone is aware of the nuclear danger. Indeed it is a matter for optimism that opinion polls show this, together with a significant Australian opposition to nuclear war. Of course not everyone who is aware of the nuclear danger can rattle off all the facts and figures or string together all those symbols like ICBM, MAD, MIRV, ACBM. Expertise in technical arguments, so loved by military strategists and arms control negotiators and often taken up with such vigour by men in the disarmament movement may just be one more way to make ordinary people feel that they are inadequate to the task, that we may be safe with experts who "understand" and that we must accept to live with the bomb.

It might be worth saying that in some disarmament actions where women predominate, much of the technical argument is set aside and words are given a more human meaning. As an example, in the early arrests at Greenham Common, women were "bound over to keep the peace". Some refused on the logical grounds that their actions were to keep the peace while those who arrested them and brought them before the courts had something other than keeping the peace in mind.

My point is that movement activists sometimes display a certain arrogance towards all those people out in the community who don't come to demonstrations. We assume that they don't know the facts or don't care. But
it does not impress most people to be told that the nuclear arsenals are capable of killing everyone on earth a dozen times or more since common sense tells you that you really can only die once.

The enormity of the problem of dismantling the nuclear war machines cannot be underestimated either. Simple solutions, no matter how attractive they may seem to those who propose them, are just not on. It might look good on a poster to say: Take the nuclear weapons out of the hands of the imperialists or out of the hands of the Americans or out of Reagan's hands if that is your analysis of the source of nuclear war threats. It might look good to say US Bases out a preference I share, or No nuclear weapons, east or west, which happens to be my particular preference. But the problem is that most of us do not even know what a nuclear weapon looks like, whether manufactured in the east or west. Even if we did know where they are stored it is not very likely that we could snatch them away from those who control them and it is doubtful that we would know what to do with them if we did.

This is not to trivialise a crucial issue but to stress that most people, including many people who are committed to action to end the threats of nuclear war, do not have much confidence that they can do anything very effective about this problem. Simple solutions often increase their doubts.

The need to connect daily concerns with the fundamental question of nuclear disarmament is not some phoney addition which seeks to convince people that there is an immediate and demonstrable connection between, say, being unemployed and the existence of United States military facilities in Australia, although it is worth noting that economic crisis followed by war has been a more obvious pattern in contemporary history than economic crisis followed by successful socialist revolution.

What really faces those who know the world and our society could be more rational, more just, more humane and more safe is that large numbers of people need to develop the confidence as individuals, as social groups, as classes, as nations, so that they can exercise some control over their lives, make meaningful choices and influence events.

In one sense, this notion has been one of the important plusses for Marxism wherever renovations have taken place. In theory, and sometimes in practice, Australian Marxists have contributed to a new politics which stresses the right to exercise control and the development of a democratic political practice. It should be said, however, that much of the credit for this renovation belongs not to the Marxists but to the women's movement, in all of its diversity. Perhaps this is because there is a connection between exercising one's right to control one's own body and exercising one's right to live.

But people who cannot be certain that they have sufficient control over their situation to be sure that they will have a job next week and people who do not even know where to turn when they are subjected to domestic violence or racial discrimination are not likely to have much confidence that they can effectively tackle such big questions of world politics as nuclear war, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. If there is to be a movement capable of fundamental social change, such a movement as now exists ought to give the highest priority to developing actions, organisations, interventions, ideology which have the common purpose of building mass confidence that change is not only desirable but possible. If that means helping someone to write a letter to a member of parliament, encouraging a group of citizens to express their opposition to particular development projects, developing an alternative program for an industry, setting up a women's self-help health group, then so be it. Such activities may not be the revolution but without them there will be no revolution and nor will there be the capacity to avoid nuclear war. What we have going for us is the irrationality of capitalism — which regularly demonstrates itself — and the widespread recognition that nuclear war is the ultimate obscenity. What we need to do is seize our time — not the time of Mao or Ho or Fidel — but our own, and with our own imagination utilise every possibility to build human awareness at every level to take common action.

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Here it is not possible to do more than indicate some directions which I think must be taken if there is to be a new phase for socialism but it is important to add that unity is not a dirty word.

The most successful movements of our time, not least the disarmament movement and the women's movement, are noted for a plurality of views and actions. Perhaps the very success of these movements derives from the fact that uniformity and conformity are not demanded but plurality is welcomed. Within a broad concept there is no insistence on that famous correct line.

The socialist movement, such as it is, remains divided within itself and from the wider movement. Perhaps it is the fact that the forces against us are so powerful that we find it easier to fight among ourselves — to blame the women's movement, the gays, the blacks, the CPA, the ALP, the SPA or one or other brand of Trotskyism for our difficulties, anyone but ourselves. Unity cannot be imposed and certainly can't be negotiated by leaders, however defined, but if we keep on trying to focus on perceptions of our enemies while we are acting in our various ways to give expression to the real and genuine movements for justice and democracy, for peace and disarmament, to end exploitation and oppression, it may become easier to work together. This would not end differences or the discussion of differences but it might put them in a more useful perspective, that is, determining what is primary and what is not.
In general, discussions in the labor movement ought to be concerned to inform rather than confront the various sectional interests of the movement. As an example it would surely be more useful to organise a round table discussion between feminists and some male trade union activists where each explained their positions than to continue the many separate discussions in pubs, clubs, conferences and seminars where each section of the movement complains of the other and attributes every possible evil motive to those who don't agree with them. The forces arrayed against us all are enormous, we should not, therefore, dissipate our limited strength but conserve it for the real battles against those who exploit us and seek to destroy us. Without that perspective the next years, one, ten or a hundred, will continue to be determined by capital and will be rather gloomy. Marx's legacy, and we ourselves, deserve better than that.

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Waiting for the Revolution?

My comments concern that part of the left which, broadly speaking, is informed by a marxist theory of society while working as part of a labor government and being concerned with the work that society generates for such departments as Youth and Community Services.

The dilemmas we face today have a long history. There are fundamental contradictions in our society which are the major cause of economic misery and suffering. To overcome such contradictions requires very radical, deep social change but we have learnt through our own experiences that there are definite limits to "parliamentary socialism" which the forces of capital will not allow to be breached.

So here I am in agreement with the revolutionary left and against the Fabian conception of socialism. But then I disagree with the revolutionary left when it comes to a choice of one's practical political activity. The choice, as old as marxism, essentially comes down to either deciding to be a pure revolutionary and work only for the end of capitalism or deciding to work within the capitalist system on the basis of a judgement that pure revolutionary activity is both futile and irrational in the current situation.

The left in the labor party makes the latter choice, estimating that revolution is so far off, it would seem, that to act as if it was near or could be realised in the near future through practical activity, is political folly.

The choice often is not clearcut. The rhetoric of one's option is often mixed with the practice of the other. But I think a coherent position can be maintained for the left, even if, at times, the choices all seem rather distasteful.

It is realised that by working in the parliamentary system which is set within a capitalist economic system, fundamental exploitation cannot be resolved. This is the task of revolution. Nevertheless, if present-day practice cannot bring the possibility of revolution nearer just now it is important to take all available opportunities to alleviate suffering and inequality. I am arguing that as there is no current possibility for revolution then suffering has to be treated from within the political system, with all the compromise that this necessarily implies. Thus work, as in youth and community services, seeks to tackle problems of homelessness, unemployment, isolation, hunger, the lack of opportunity to care for children, the violence which poverty engenders.

Now all these problems can be traced back to the inequalities created by capitalism but revolutionary activity is neither halting these missions nor enhancing the value of socialism. Our historical predicament is that only by the changes that can be achieved within capitalism can the values of socialism be furthered. Such changes are limited and do not go to the prime cause, but they do stop the worst excesses of economic degradation.

So while I do not believe that socialism will be achieved by parliamentary or social welfare means I do believe that reformist practice is the only moral choice which history allows. In other words, the desire to end capitalism has a moral motivation.

Ann Symonds