Australian Left Review

August '79 ≈≈ No. 70

ESCAMBRAY THEATRE: MEXICAN COMMUNISTS: CHILDREN '79

Registered for posting as a publication, Category B.
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IN THIS ISSUE

The long and desperate struggle of the East Timorese people is analysed in some detail by Denis Freney.


Pete Cockcroft interviews Mexican Communist Enrique Semo recently in Australia for the CPA National Congress.

Richard Fletcher who attended the World Youth Festival in Cuba last year writes of the Cuban Escambray Theatre and its implications for the development of a new style of political theatre in Australia.

Ruth and Maurie Crow have contributed an article on International Children's Year, the dehumanising effects of capitalism on young people growing up today, and the alternatives.

In Economic Notes Gavan Butler discusses the reductions in the social wage.

Finally, Roger Coates reviews Ralph Miliband's Marxism and Polities with particular reference to the chapter on reform and revolution, and Kathe Boehringer reviews Blue Collar shown recently at the Sydney Film Festival.

Front Cover Photo:
The Escambray Theatre performing in a school in Escambray province, Cuba.
In the six months since the article below was written, the main trends outlined have been confirmed by events. Fretilin forces continue to fight throughout the territory, despite the heavy blows inflicted by the death of President Nicolau Lobato and the betrayal of Xavier do Amaral (now Suharto's puppet Vice President) and Alarico Fernandes. The genocidal war continues on Suharto's side, but, even on Jakarta's own census figures, they control only half the population of East Timor.

Within Indonesia, the Suharto regime has never been more under challenge. Workers, driven to desperation by high inflation and low frozen wages, have engaged in a series of illegal strikes; students are reorganising following the repression of the last half of 1978, while intellectuals, dissident military men, and even some of the puppet parliamentarians, are criticising the regime.

Internationally, however, Suharto continues to manoeuvre within the context of the conflicts in Indochina and between the Soviet Union and China. This inevitably places East Timor in a difficult position in attempting to win support, for example, within the non-aligned nations movement. Nevertheless, the crucial and decisive factor is the continuing resistance of the Maubere people — the final guarantee of victory.

Introduction

While much was written about East Timor before December 7, 1975, little if anything has been written about the struggle that has occurred since then. With the exception of reports on Indonesian atrocities in the past three years, no consistent attempt has been made to analyse the struggle of the Maubere people during the past three years — a struggle that must enter into the annals of history as one of the most tenacious and difficult yet seen in the colonial revolution.

As a result, much that has been written by journalists and other commentators since December 1975 has been through the prism of what they witnessed before the invasion, including their analysis of individuals and political forces at play. Yet, just as it would be impossible to analyse occurrences between April 1974 and December 1975 in East Timor through the prism of journalistic observation before April 1974, so is it impossible to understand the current situation in East Timor without analysing in depth events since the full-scale Indonesian invasion.

There are, of course, major difficulties in doing that. East Timor has been blockaded by Suharto’s forces since December 1975. No independent observer has entered the country and only a few journalists have been allowed to go on a short guided tour (with one exception) lasting 24 or 48 hours. Naturally, those who have gone on these guided tours have produced virtually nothing of value in terms of independent observation.

That leaves three sources: the most valuable is the result of three years of two-way and one-way radio contact with Fretilin. The second source are reports by refugees who left the country after the invasion, and from letters smuggled out from Dili to the outside world. These are usually both anti-Fretilin and anti-Indonesian, and have limited access to events in the mountains. The third source is Indonesian propaganda — itself usually so blatant and self-contradictory that it must be totally discarded. But, as with any propaganda, the internal contradictions it contains are themselves useful in getting a view of what is really happening.

The International Context

The East Timorese revolution cannot be understood unless it is placed in an international context which includes both the global context — the contradictions between imperialism and those countries which have abolished capitalism, and the contradictions among the countries which have abolished capitalism — and the specific regional context in which East Timor exists and the specific ideological-political influences which affected it as a Portuguese colony.

In the global context, East Timor’s political awakening occurred in the final death agony of imperialism in Viet Nam, Kampuchea and Laos. American imperialism was seriously weakened by its humiliating defeat, but equally determined to crush any sign of rebellion. For some time it had been sponsoring its agent-regimes as ‘strong men’ able to intervene, now that it was politically impossible to send in the marines and B-52s any more. In west Asia and the Middle East there were Iran and Israel. In South-East Asia, Indonesia was the logical choice as gendarme.

It was in this context that Suharto was encouraged to invade East Timor. In literature dealing with American imperialism’s role in East Timor, there has been a passive noting that Ford and Kissinger were in Jakarta a few days before the invasion, and that America has been the major supplier of military hardware for the Indonesian aggression. Generally, there has been a ‘journalistic’ failure to draw the conclusion that is clear: the invasion of East Timor was an act of aggression inspired and totally supported by American imperialism, which fitted into its post-Viet Nam strategy of using puppets to crush liberation movements wherever they may develop; of Asians fighting Asians — with the oppressors armed with American military hardware.

The Fretilin Central Committee has always been very clear in identifying imperialism and, above all, American imperialism as the main enemy, with Suharto’s regime as its willing and bloodthirsty puppet. It is time this conclusion was clearly spelt out in the solidarity movement as well, and an end made to attempts to put a gloss on this easily
established fact. American imperialism’s support for Suharto was no mistake, no more than Carter’s support for the bloody-handed Shah is or was a ‘mistake’. Both fit within imperialism’s strategy and are not due to the decision of one group of ‘baddies’ in the State Department or Pentagon going against the ‘humanitarian’ policies of Carter.

The East Timorese revolution has also been a victim of the contradictions which have reached explosion point between China and the Soviet Union; between Viet Nam and Kampuchea in South-East Asia. I do not intend here to go into the rights and wrongs of these contradictions, or say which country has been more guilty.

It is sufficient to note that the dictators of South-East Asia — Suharto, Marcos, the Thai generals, Lee and Onn — were shaking in their shoes after imperialism’s defeat in Viet Nam and Kampuchea and from the interplay of these contradictions. All parties concerned have launched a great competition to woo these dictatorships, and the Suhartos and others have been able to exploit these contradictions.

After the defeat of imperialism in Indochina, the East Timorese people had the right to expect the fullest possible support from all anti-imperialist countries. True, all nations concerned have voted with East Timor in the United Nations and have to different degrees given moral, diplomatic and political support. But too often this has been dictated in its degree by the diplomatic considerations in South-East Asia vis-a-vis the attitude Suharto has taken to the Sino-Soviet-Viet Nam-Kampuchean contradictions.

Similarly, the East Timorese people should have been able to expect solidarity and support from the Portuguese government(s) following the overthrow of fascism in April 1974. But, despite the ‘decolinisation’ declarations of successive governments since April 1974, the East Timorese people have been betrayed at each step by regimes who showed no interest in East Timor except to disengage as quickly as possible and even acquiesce in the Indonesian takeover (despite diplomatic protests). Sadly, this applied even to the most left of those governments, for whom the plea of over-involvement in Africa and at home is no excuse.

In Australia, the East Timorese people could equally have expected support from the first Labor government in 23 years. But, on the contrary, they were shamefully betrayed, by Whitlam in particular. There is no need to repeat the disgusting story of this betrayal — it is well documented now. It must also be said that the Australian left has no excuse in pleading the crisis that developed here in 1975 for its lack of stronger action in those days.

It was only in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa that the East Timorese people found their true friends and comrades-in-arms. But in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and so on the final stage of revolution was just being achieved and their possibilities for action were severely limited. It was only after the invasion that these comrades-in-arms could more fully mobilise their still limited resources.

Of course, there were many many deficiencies in Fretilin’s diplomacy in the period of April 1974 to December 1975. In the main, this was due to the speed with which the situation developed. It was only 16 months after the formation of ASDT-Fretilin that the UDT staged its coup and 17 months after the start that Fretilin was in full control of the country. That is a very, very short time to develop an international diplomacy able to meet the needs of the invasion to come.

But there were other factors: the influence of the conservative wing of Fretilin was dominant in this diplomacy and was centred on the need to win Australia to a position of support for East Timor’s right to independence. When it became clear — very early — that Whitlam had sold out to Suharto, this conservative diplomatic line turned to the Liberal-Country Party Opposition as its mainstay, and particularly to that hypocritical little man, Andrew Peacock. Peacock’s advice was, naturally, to trust him, not to turn to the natural allies of the East Timorese people, and, above all, to reassure Suharto with promises, for instance, to follow ASEAN foreign policy.

The hypocritical reassurances of Peacock led to illusions that Indonesia would not openly invade, but would continue the border war for some time. Valuable time was lost, despite the initiatives of Nicolau Lobato in visiting Mozambique and Portugal, in an attempt to widen the diplomatic front. This
does not negate what we said earlier: it was the conservative wing of Fretilin that determined the main line of foreign policy and diplomatic efforts towards (of all people) Andrew Peacock, and the continuing efforts of this conservative wing to dovetail Fretilin’s foreign policy with Australia — and Indonesia. In other words, the conservatives’ control of Fretilin diplomatic efforts was used in an effort to foist on Fretilin a neo-colonial solution — an effort that in turn negated the mass line and revolutionary policy Fretilin was adopting internally. It was only after the invasion that Fretilin’s diplomatic orientation turned to its natural allies — after the most favourable period (Fretilin’s control of the whole country) had changed.

To sum up: What seemed to be a highly favourable international context in 1974-1975 turned out to be an illusion. The East Timorese people have had to fight using their own resources, with solidarity greatly limited on all fronts. Essentially, the disappointments with the international context were not of Fretilin’s making, despite mistakes made before and since. There is no doubt that the failure of the superficially favourable international context to provide the support hoped for was, initially at least, a blow to the East Timorese people. But it is a blow they have survived and as early as March 1976, the Supreme Council of Struggle adopted a policy of total self-reliance, counting on their own resources. This is a slogan often voiced by liberation movements and, of course, in all cases has a basis of truth: no nation has ever won its liberation from outside alone and not through its own efforts. But never — to my knowledge — has a movement and a whole people had to apply the slogan of self-reliance so totally as the East Timorese people. Their astonishing success in the past three years and their continuing success despite all the difficulties will bring the possibility of their not having to be so totally self-reliant closer in the future.

In such a situation of total self-reliance, the different lines among the Fretilin Central Committee which, in the pre-invasion period, were contained within a certain division of labour and a democratic process of decision-making which led to a united front, became clearer and antagonistic in the post-invasion period.

The Two Lines Within Fretilin

Despite the clearly stated policy for total independence, there existed from the beginning inside the Fretilin leadership, a minority, conservative wing which never really believed that the Maubere people could win total independence from imperialism and Suharto’s fascist-military clique. For this group, the strategy was always to attempt to win Fretilin to acceptance of East Timorese ‘independence’ as that of a ‘client state’, whose independence would be as real as that of Bhutan from India.

The aim of making East Timor a ‘client state’ was also that of a strong wing of Australian mini-imperialism, represented by the Defence Department and JIO. The clearest exponent of this line was Peter Hastings (who unashamedly admitted in the Sydney Morning Herald of January 1, 1979 that he held this as the best alternative). A ‘client state’ is in fact the most extreme form of neo-colonialism which denies the ‘client’ even the semblance of independence in anything but name. From the earliest days of ASDT, the conservative wing of that organisation proposed concessions to Indonesia in the form of economic and foreign policy which added up to an acceptance of a ‘client state’ status. Later this was broadened to try to entice Australia to join Indonesia as the masters of this puppet ‘independent’ state.

On the other hand, the revolutionary majority of the Fretilin Central Committee after the transformation of ASDT into Fretilin, had the front adopt a clear-cut policy opposing neo-colonialism and of struggling for total independence. This line was confirmed in the May 1976 meeting of the Supreme Council of Struggle and has been reiterated at all such meetings since.

It is in that sense that we must understand the rejection of ‘negotiations’ by the Fretilin Central Committee. Let us state quite clearly that those in the conservative minority of the Fretilin CC have all understood ‘negotiations’ as meaning a ‘compromise’ in which East Timor would accept a ‘client state’ status. This was so for the Xavier do Amaral group and was even more clearly so for Alarico Fernandes and his group. The debate about ‘negotiations’ inside Fretilin throughout the past three years has not revolved around the use of ‘negotiations’ for
diplomatic purposes, to divide the enemy and put them diplomatically on the defensive, while refusing to ‘compromise’ on the demand for total independence. This, of course, is the way ‘negotiations’ were carried out by the liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies and by the Vietnamese.

In East Timor, the debate on ‘negotiations’ was really a debate on whether Fretilin should accept a ‘compromise’ and a ‘client state’ status, or whether they fight on to final victory. Both sides—the conservative and revolutionary wings—understood the debate in those terms. The slogan ‘negotiations never’ meant for both sides a rejection of neo-colonial solutions; and that is why Xavier and then Fernandes staged their attempted coups—to prepare the way for a neo-colonial solution.

In the outside world and in the solidarity movements, the clear position of the Fretilin CC on ‘negotiations’ has been misunderstood. Some have attempted to present the CC position as ‘ultra-left’, as an abstract, ‘theoretical’ one, ignoring the very real struggle inside Fretilin and how the question of ‘negotiations’ was interpreted by both sides. As in any such debate, it is never an abstract or ‘theoretical’ one, but deeply reflects the basic questions posed for the revolution: to surrender or to fight for final victory.

In the solidarity movements, we must also ask those who have taken the side of ‘negotiations’ in the debate within Fretilin: Are you supporting ‘negotiations’ because you believe that the East Timorese people cannot win total independence, and that a ‘client state’ status is all that can be won, short of total integration in Suharto’s empire? Do you support ‘negotiations’ and a ‘compromise’ (neo-colonial) solution for ‘humanitarian reasons’, to stop the genocide Suharto has unleashed against the East Timorese people?

I believe that, in fact, these are the reasons many have supported a ‘compromise’ solution. Many people oppose Suharto’s invasion for humanitarian reasons, and that is natural and, in part at least, correct. The same happened, of course, in the big movement in Australia and around the world in opposition to American aggression in Viet
Nam and Kampuchea. With Viet Nam, desire to stop the genocide was a deep and correct feeling among the masses around the world who opposed the American war. But what was the answer? Was it to demand that the Vietnamese people surrender or agree to be a ‘client state’ of American imperialism? Or was it to respect (and support) the right of the Vietnamese people to fight for their independence, despite the terrible cost inflicted on them by American imperialism, and demand instead that American and Australian troops withdraw from Viet Nam and end their ‘Vietnamisation’ of the war? To my knowledge, no one raised the demand that the Vietnamese people stop fighting and accept a neo-colonial solution — no one, that is, except the Pentagon and the Thieu regime.

The Vietnamese, Kampuchean and Laotian people, like the Mozambican, Angolan and Guinean people paid a terrible price, in terms of human lives and physical and ecological destruction, for their independence. Similarly, imperialism and the Suharto military-fascist regime is imposing a terribly high cost on the East Timorese people for their independence. Who has the right to tell the East Timorese people not to fight?

In fact, the enemies of the East Timorese people interpret every sign of desire for a ‘compromise’ or neo-colonial solution as a sign of weakness, including when it comes from the supporters of the East Timorese people. The surrender of Xavier do Amaral and Alarico Fernandes, in fact, prolong the war, because they boost the morale of the Indonesian troops, who begin again to believe that the ‘end of the tunnel’ is in sight and the resistance will collapse. The Maubere people will pay with thousands more dead for their betrayal.

Yet those who support the right of the East Timorese people to fight for total independence are sometimes accused of wanting to fight to the last Timorese, and of being fanatical. Let us be very clear: they themselves have decided that they will fight for ‘independence or death’ — their decision was not, and is not, made in Sydney or anywhere else. The Maubere people have accepted the terrible cost they are being forced to pay, rather than live in slavery under Suharto. They are not the first people to have made such a decision, and they will not be the last. Objectively, not to support their decision is to increase the suffering and the cost in lives they will have to pay. To support the traitors inside Fretilin who want a neo-colonial solution is in fact to prolong the war. As for being ‘fanatical’: if to do everything possible to support the East Timorese people, to support their rejection of neo-colonialism or surrender, is fanatical, then so be it. Indeed, it seems to me that the ‘fanaticism’ often comes from the other side of the debate.

To be ‘fanatical’ is to be irrational, to not study a question deeply, and to blindly follow an ‘ideological’ position, without consideration of the human aspects involved. It is my belief that the revolutionary position, in this case, is the real ‘humanitarian’ position; it is the rational position.

The struggle in the liberated areas

As already stated, there have been two fundamentally opposed lines within the Fretilin CC, and over the past three years these two lines have increasingly come into conflict in the question of whether to fight for final and total victory, or to accept a neo-colonial solution. In the two major explosions of the contradictions between these two lines, the revolutionary line has been victorious, and the ‘conservative wing’ leaders (Xavier do Amaral and Alarico Fernandes) have been forced to recognise the reality of their line’s logic: total surrender.

To understand the evolution of this internal struggle in the liberated areas, it is necessary to look at the main outlines of the revolutionary resistance offered by the East Timorese people in the past three years.

In some respects, the East Timorese people were in a stronger position at the beginning of the invasion than liberation movements in other countries when they began their guerrilla wars. First, Fretilin had total control of the whole country; it had captured the substantial arsenal of the Portuguese colonial army (captured — not surrendered by the Portuguese). They had at least a skeleton administrative structure operating. Thus the invaders were entering a terrain they did not know, and the positions were reversed when compared, for example, with
Mozambique, where the Portuguese fascists were 'in place' and Frelimo had to begin the reconquest of their country from small bases.

Of course, the overwhelming military superiority of the Indonesian invaders enabled them to capture Dili, Baucau and some of the other main administrative centres (which, however, had a low population) within a relatively short period — by mid-1976 they had captured a dozen such small towns. However, Fretelin not only maintained near total control of the countryside where 90 per cent of the population lived, but also threw cordons around the isolated Indonesian outposts, and on many occasions forced the Indonesians to pull out. The first six months were crucial: Fretelin and Falintil were able to organise a stable resistance and stabilised liberated areas which in fact took over 80 per cent of the country. Falintil established its 'front lines' surrounding the Indonesian outposts and protecting these liberated areas, where life was able to proceed with some normality and the revolutionary organisation of the masses for production, self-defence and education and health was able to develop with the necessary speed.

At the end of 1976 and beginning of 1977, Suharto's forces launched a number of desperate and large-scale offensives which aimed at destroying key liberated areas. But Fretelin, with amazing success, defeated these offensives. As a result, from approximately March to September 1977, Suharto's forces were forced to abstain from any large-scale attacks, and were content with small-scale raids which met fierce resistance. At the same time, they stepped up air raids on the liberated areas, with the strategy of destroying food crops, massacring the civilian population, and destabilising the liberated areas. Yet it can be said that until September 1977, the Indonesians had suffered a major and demoralising defeat: they were unable to end their isolation in a dozen small towns, or break Fretelin control of the vast liberated areas and the vast majority of the population.

It is convenient therefore to divide the struggle and resistance in East Timor into the two periods of December 1975 to September 1977, and September 1977 to the present. September 1977 is a turning point in a number of respects: it marks the arrest of Xavier do Amaral by Fretelin and the defeat of his attempted coup, and secondly, marks the beginning of Suharto's new offensives which are described by Fretelin as 'campaigns of encirclement and annihilation'. These campaigns aimed at encirclement of liberated areas and the systematic destruction of crops and of the civilian population.

But first let us look at developments in the liberated areas from December 1975 to September 1977. Alarico Fernandes failed over a period of three years to give anything but the most general outline of the situation in the liberated areas. However, the best source is the speech of President Nicolau Lobato on September 14, 1977 after the arrest of Xavier do Amaral. This speech is an excellent source because a picture emerges of the life in the liberated areas, incidental to the main theme of the speech.

It should be noted that security was strong within the liberated zones. For example, the meeting of the top Fretelin leadership — the Supreme Council of Struggle and the Political Committee took place in Soibada from May 20 to June 2, 1976. The same bodies held a joint meeting in Lalini from March 8 to May 20, 1977 — in other words, major leaders of Fretelin were able to meet for nearly three months in full security, to discuss the development of the struggle. (Another major meeting of these two bodies occurred in October 1977 which elected President Nicolau Lobato and Vice-President Mau-Lear to head Fretelin. Details of the length and place of this meeting have not yet been released.)

Movement around the country, from one liberated area to another, was safe and relatively easy. Xavier do Amaral was condemned for his 'visits to festivities with big noise and big banquets; long voyages in cavalcade with the noise of numerous guards and opportunists and hangers-on, authentic parasites who lived off the people everywhere; big colonial-style dances, lasting all night and sometimes all week...'

While President Nicolau Lobato was, of course, absolutely correct in condemning this feudal-colonial style of living, the fact that Xavier do Amaral was able, as a person not noted for his courage, to act in this way, shows the degree of security in this period, in
Production was well organised in this period. Seed grains were distributed throughout the country from a central point and according to an organised plan. Xavier do Amaral was accused of seizing seed grain being sent to other sectors and of boycotting plans to mobilise the population for production as decided by the Permanent Committee of Fretilin in September 1976. Fernandes reported, in May 1977, that the harvest over the previous year had exceeded any previous harvest in the colonial history of East Timor. Production was organised through co-operatives and the collective labour of the whole population in the liberated areas.

Fretilin organised the 'political, military and technical organisation, modernisation and training of Falintil' in this period, to better prepare it to defend and extend the liberated areas. Front lines were organised around the Indonesian garrisoned small towns, and anyone crossing these lines had to produce authorisation from Fretilin. Falintil was shaped into a regular army, with special units or 'shock brigades'.

Fretilin campaigned against the remnants of feudalism and obscurantism in the liberated areas — the lulics, arranged marriages, lurais, tribalism and regionalism, feudal servitude — and the colonial practices of subservience to 'big men' and so on.

Organisational work included efforts to replace supplies cut off by the blockade and invasion: sugar was grown and processed — and it was on display at the May 1976 meeting. Traditional medicines were developed and researched to replace medical supplies cut off from the liberated areas. Gunpowder and mines were produced from raw materials in the liberated areas. Education continued using the most basic materials. Printing facilities were developed, including for leaflets and booklets in Bahasa Indonesia for circulation among Indonesian troops.

In short, despite the boycott on information about the organisation of life in the liberated areas imposed by Alarico Fernandes, particularly from mid-1977, a picture emerges from documented material available, of a stable, organised life, only marginally disturbed by the massive Indonesian military offensives launched in this period.

In September 1977, the Indonesian military began to adopt a new tactic: it concentrated its forces in a small area and began an intensive campaign of 'encirclement and annihilation', accompanied by intensive air, land and sea bombardment, aimed at surrounding liberated areas, capturing the civilian population, destroying food crops and stores, and destabilising Fretilin and Falintil organisation in these areas. Helicopters carried troops and heavy artillery to strategically placed mountain tops, to continuously shell the liberated areas in which they were situated and to 'soften up' Falintil for massive infantry and armoured attack.

The first attacks, in early September 1977, were timed to coincide with the planned coup by Xavier do Amaral. This was prevented by his arrest. These attacks were concentrated in the south and north border areas. The next offensives occurred in the centre-north sector in June 1978 and soon after in the centre-south and centre-east sectors.

On May 20, 1978, President Nicolau Lobato described how the campaigns of encirclement and annihilation in the border sectors were near collapse because of the fierce resistance of hundreds of thousands of Mauberes. Just before exposing his betrayal, and while still in contact with Falintil headquarters, Fernandes reported, on September 27, that Indonesians had been forced to withdraw to a few strategic places in the north border sector. The latest news, from a letter smuggled out of Dili, reports fierce fighting recently in the Railaco area in this north border sector.

What, then, is the situation in East Timor now? It is a fact that the campaigns of encirclement and annihilation have only had success in the centre-north sector. This is not accidental. The centre-north sector (the area south and east of Dili) was the 'feudal fief' of Xavier do Amaral; it was also the scene of Alarico Fernandes' planned counter-revolutionary coup, called by him 'Operation Skylight'. At first under Xavier do Amaral and then under Alarico Fernandes, this centre-north sector had been the scene of all plots hatched against the revolutionary
majority of the Fretilin Central Committee. It was in this area, and part of the centre-south sector that Xavier do Amaral boycotted organisation and production, set up his own feudal-type administration, encouraged obscurantism and regionalism and generally disorganised life so much that it was even then particularly vulnerable to Indonesian attack. There is no reason to believe this changed much under Alarico Fernandes, who himself in the secret Saturno messages admitted his organisation for ‘Operation Skylight’ began in October 1977 — that is, almost immediately after Xavier’s arrest.

We must fear then that the situation described by President Nicolau Lobato, as existing in September 1977, had not changed much in the centre-north sector by June 1978. The Maubere Revolution had swept the remainder of the country and provided the social and political basis for the defeat of the Indonesian offensives in the two border sectors. These offensives have also been severely checked, or even may be by now defeated, in the centre-south and centre-east sectors.

The ‘victories’ won by the Indonesians have all occurred in the centre-north sector: it was from here that Alarico Fernandes released Xavier do Amaral, as the advance-guard to contact the Indonesians for ‘Operation Skylight’; it was from here, too, that Alarico Fernandes himself surrendered. It was in this sector that Nicolau Lobato was killed when he was, perhaps, attempting to reorganise the resistance after the betrayal of Fernandes. Similarly, the many people who have left the mountains and who were previously part of the educated elite who supported Fretilin, have come from the centre-north sector in their vast majority.

It is clear then that the situation in the centre-north sector has deteriorated badly and that it is here, and here alone, that the Suharto regime has won its first substantial ‘victory’ since the beginning of the invasion. The ‘victory’ in this sector is not a defeat for the revolutionary line of Fretilin, but rather is an indication that its revolutionary line is an absolute necessity for final victory. It shows that the line of the revolutionary majority of the Fretilin Central Committee, led by President Nicolau Lobato, Vice-President Mau-Lear and National Political Commissioner Sa’he, is the guarantee for
victory.

No doubt, the resistance will be reconstructed in the centre-north sector. No doubt, also, the Indonesians will have their morale boosted by this victory, which I believe will only prove temporary, although it could have the result of increased military pressure on the centre-south sector where Xavier do Amaral also infected some parts with his feudal and tribalist approach, and where Alarico Fernandes boasted he had sent some of his agents before his surrender. But such defeats and retreats must be expected in a protracted people's war — indeed, it is a sign of the strength of the resistance of the Maubere people and of their revolution that it is only now, after three years of war, the Suharto military regime has achieved such a 'success'. But it is a 'success' built on clay — a win gained through the political weakness and disorganisation in the centre-north sector and the betrayal of Xavier do Amaral and Alarico Fernandes.

We can expect Suharto's propaganda machine to make much of this very limited 'victory'. After all, they have been starved of real success in the past, and have been forced to manufacture 'victories' and declare repeatedly that Fretilin has been defeated over the past two years. Moreover, the morale of Suharto's troops in East Timor is very low and weariness with the war is growing. We can expect fabrications built on the very real difficulties in the centre-north sector. The Australian and world capitalist media will print all the Suharto propaganda as gospel truth.

The solidarity movement must 'keep its head', avoid the pressure to demoralisation, and remain confident that the struggle continues and that Suharto will finally be forced to withdraw from East Timor. It has the weapon on a concrete, realistic, political analysis towards which, I hope, this paper will be a contribution. Anyone who thinks that revolutionary war proceeds in a straight line to victory without reverses, partial defeats, betrayals and then resurgence, deepening of the revolution and new victories, is living in a dream world.

Revolutionary war, particularly one as difficult as that in East Timor, is a contradictory and complex phenomenon. Above all, revolutionary war depends on a real, deep revolution taking place among the broad masses, so that every man and woman becomes a soldier and militant of the revolutionary war, constantly deepening his or her political understanding, and throwing up cadres and leaders from among the Maubere people themselves, able to carry the struggle forward.

That said, I wish to conclude by examining the perspectives of the Maubere revolution and the possibilities by which Suharto's military-fascist forces can be forced to accept their defeat and withdraw from East Timor.

**Perspectives for the Revolution**

I want, first, to make some comments about the 'Revolution' and its perspectives before going on to the more general question of how victory will be won.

There has been a profound revolutionary process going on in the liberated areas of East Timor. It began in one sense from the founding of ASDT, then took a leap forward with the transformation of ASDT into Fretilin in September 1974 and the adoption of its political program. Next came the attempted UDT coup in August 1975 and the successful Fretilin counter-offensive, which brought Fretilin into power throughout the country from September 1975 to December 1975, during which period Fretilin had to cope, not only with the border incursions by Suharto's troops, but also with the complex problems of social, political and economic organisation, which gave rise to the embryonic forms which developed after the invasion. The invasion in December 1975 resulted in the first wave of betrayals — the weakest and most corrupt surrendered very soon after the invasion.

The May 1976 meeting of the Supreme Council of Struggle and the Fretilin Political Committee was a decisive meeting which reaffirmed the determination to continue the struggle to final victory, to reject a 'compromise solution', and to proceed with the organisation of the liberated areas for a long-protracted revolutionary people's war. The next meeting, from March to May 1977, reaffirmed and deepened these decisions. In October 1977, a second major turning point occurred with the defeat of the Xavier coup attempt and the election of President Nicolau Lobato, Vice-President Mau-Lear and
National Political Commissioner Sa'he to head the struggle. The following year saw the further deepening of the revolutionary process in the liberated areas. The question of transforming Frelimo into a movement into a revolutionary party also took shape and it was within this framework of the deepening of the revolution that Alarico Fernandes prepared his coup in the form of 'Operation Skylight'.

Throughout the past four years, the Maubere people have been fighting not only a war of resistance but also to deepen their revolution against the internal reactionaries in the liberated areas. That very clearly shows the dual nature of the struggle of the Maubere people — to defeat the Indonesian fascist aggressors, and to develop their own revolution, in which exploitation will be defeated. These two aspects of the struggle are not independent, but are intertwined. Without the victory of the revolution in the liberated areas, the aggressors will not be defeated. And, of course, without the defeat of the aggressors, the revolution cannot achieve its full flowering.

There are a number of ways in which we can foresee final victory of the Maubere people occurring. The Indonesians could be totally defeated militarily as the puppet troops were in Viet Nam and Kampuchea. However, Frelimo would have to have heavy and more sophisticated weapons than they do at present to achieve such a goal. Alternatively, the process could be more like what happened in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau: Indonesian soldiers and lower-ranking officers could refuse to fight any more in a war which they cannot win in East Timor, and demand to return home, and if that is refused, finally themselves overthow or join the masses in overthrowing, the Suharto dictatorship. In other words, Suharto could go the same way as Caetano did, and after some attempts by a new regime to salvage a 'compromise solution', unconditional withdrawal of the Indonesian troops from East Timor could be won.

Given the 'international context' outlined in the first part of this paper, it is my belief that the second alternative is the more likely one. The Suharto regime, while seemingly having overcome the agitation that occurred early last year, is nevertheless unstable. The worsening economic situation, following the recent 50 per cent devaluation, is an explosive ingredient in the crisis. Previously cautious observers are now tipping Suharto will not last out 1979.

Of course, it cannot be excluded that the CIA will favour a 'preventive coup' by another group of generals who can present themselves as 'cleanskins'. If that type of coup occurred, there would be no guarantee that the new group of generals would retreat from East Timor. They would have two alternatives: blame Suharto for invading in the first place, contrary to the Indonesian Constitution, and seek a 'compromise solution' with East Timor as a 'client state', or blame Suharto for the mismanagement of the war and promise the soldiers that they will manage it successfully to final victory.

It is for this reason that Suharto and his clique were so jubilant at the murder of Nicolau Lobato. It was to boost morale, to claim a 'victory' that Defence Minister General Yusuf flew to Dili to decorate the soldiers who carried out the alleged killing, and to bring back Nicolau Lobato's alleged rifle to the Jakarta military museum! It was because the war in East Timor is a thorn in Suharto's flesh that a special nationwide TV broadcast was made immediately the death of Lobato became known in Indonesia.

But Suharto's jubilation will be short-lived. He will learn very soon that the struggle continues. The cannon-fodder in his army will learn that many more thousands of them will have to die in East Timor.

The convergence of the continuing revolutionary war in East Timor with the upsurge of the mass struggle in Indonesia itself will result in the overthrow of Suharto. The longer time passes before Suharto is removed, the more likely it is that the next regime in Indonesia will be a progressive one, and the order given to withdraw the troops from East Timor. That is why the Americans are preparing a 'preventive coup'. After all, they have learnt something from Iran. They don't want the streets of Makarta to be like those in Tehran.

There is no basis for defeatism and demoralisation when we examine the East Timorese Revolution.

Victory is certain and only a matter of time!
The 1949 coal strike was an event of wide-ranging significance in the post-war history of Australia. In the thirty years since, a great deal has been said and written about the causes, conduct and outcome of the strike, and most analysts appear to agree that the economic claims of the miners were well founded; many of the analysts in turn agree that the miners were justified in taking strike action. But a fuller picture has emerged with the publication of Phillip Deery's *Labour in Conflict: The 1949 Coal Strike*, a selection of documents linked by the editor's commentary.

The fourteen points adopted by the National Convention of the Miners' Federation in August 1948 were merged into four major demands: long-service leave, a 35-hour week, a thirty-shillings-weekly wage increase and the provision of pit and town amenities. In the prolonged negotiations between the miners, coal owners, Joint Coal Board, and the Coal Industry Tribunal, the owners rejected the 35-hour-week claim, made long-service leave conditional on odious, provocative conditions, proposed incentive payments instead of a wage increase and wanted the elimination of the compulsory retirement age of sixty years.

In the final round of negotiations — for which the miners had agreed to postpone their mass meetings from June 2 to June 16 — the owners rejected the long-service leave claim. The Coal Industry Tribunal (Gallagher) was to arbitrate on this claim but withheld his judgement when the Miners' Central Council decided to proceed with aggregate meetings on June 16. Strike action may still have been avoided or delayed but for the decision of the NSW Combined Colliery Proprietors Association — endorsed by Gallagher — to file an application restraining employees from striking. (This application was aimed at the prosecution of union leaders in the event of a strike.) The aggregate meetings of the miners voted ten to one in favour of strike action and the strike began on June 27.

This strike of the miners for their economic claims was not a 'communist plot'. It stemmed from the miners' real needs and
was undertaken on their own decision. Apart from some disagreement about whether the pre-strike negotiations should have been continued further, the economic core of the miners' decision to strike is not much in question. Controversy has centred on Communist Party aims and influence in relation to the course of the strike: the efforts to 'politicise' the strike and use it in warfare against reformism and against the Labor government. It was this political approach, it is argued, which prolonged the strike beyond the point at which it should have terminated if the economic aims of the miners had been the only consideration.

Responsibility for this Communist Party political line as it relates to the 1949 coal strike has generally been attributed to me. For example, Ralph Gibson, in his book My Years in the Communist Party (1966), expressed the accepted view:

But, in spite of all difficulties, more could and should have been done to find a broad basis for waging the struggle. The Communist Party (though it was far from having a majority of members on the Miners' Federation Central Council or on the Combined Mining Unions Council which conducted the struggle) could have assisted with better advice had this not been the period of the 'Left line' when comrades Blake and Henry had a majority position in the Central Committee Secretariat of the Party. Their line may be judged from the fact that they proclaimed the final defeat as a 'great working class victory' because the workers 'secured in this struggle invaluable lessons on the true role of Labor governments'. (This verdict on the miners' strike — significantly — has recently been defended by E. F. Hill.) (p. 149.)

In this connection, dealing with the background to the actual strike, Phillip Deery quotes the stenographic report of a speech made by J. D. Blake to a Political Committee meeting of the CPA, March 15, 1946 (that is more than three years before the coal strike). An extract conveys its main content:

We set ourselves, it seems to me, the objective of developing and leading the struggle of the workers against the employing class; ....we set ourselves the objective of teaching the masses of the Labor Party, the workers, by their own experience in the struggle, the worthlessness of their social democratic leaders. In other words of winning the masses away from their adherence to social democracy, of winning them to our position, the revolutionary position of the Communist Party. (Deery, p. 31.)

All members of the Committee rejected Blakes's analysis. As Deery says: "L. Sharkey accused him of 'left sectarianism', R. Dixon in a lengthy criticism suggested he should 'have a refresher' of Lenin's Left Wing Communism...." (Deery, p. 31.)

This particular discussion arose out of the condemnation by the Political Committee of a sentence in a draft resolution written by me for an impending (1946) Victorian State Conference of the Party. The sentence in question (eliminated by the Political Committee) read: "The workers will gain from Labor governments, as from other governments, only that for which they are prepared to unite, organise, and fight". My line of thinking was directed against the wartime wage pegging regulations which the Chifley government continued to maintain in force. (The Melbourne public transport strike towards the end of 1946 made the first breach in wage pegging. The more prolonged Victorian metalworkers strike, which immediately followed, effectively ended the wage freeze.)

The documents provide a picture of the political and industrial situation before the coal strike. In his speech to the 15th National Congress of the CPA in May 1948, R. Dixon said:

The strike wave is not only beginning to embrace new sections of the working class and drawing them into active political life, but is also resulting in exposing the role of the capitalist state, the Labor Party and reformist leaders and is opening the way for the passing of the masses to the side of the Communist Party.... In spite of the fact that the political nature of the strike(s) will tend to increase, there are strikes led by reformists and by some Communist trade union officials which are conducted as purely economic strikes and this is most unsatisfactory.... If it is to play the leading role in this struggle, the working class must be drawn into action in the struggle against capitalism on a broader scale. The Labor Party reformist betrayers must be isolated and the Communist Party brought forward as the organiser of the people's struggle against reaction.... Comrade Sharkey spoke about the length and bitterness of the Queensland strike and said we must expect more struggles of this nature in the future.... The Queensland rail strike gives an indication
of the nature of future strike struggles. The strike commenced around economic demands but became, in the course of the struggle, a strike of vast political implications. The Labour Government emerged as the chief strikebreaker for the bourgeoisie.

... The struggles that face the Party and the working class, we can expect, will assume great political importance. The capitalist state machine will be swung into action against the workers, reactionary laws will be used, the trade unions and the Communist Party will be attacked and this will tend to emphasize the political characteristics of the strikes. (Deery, pp. 36-37. Originally in Communist Review, June 1948, pp. 165-67.)

That this was directly linked to the situation in the coal industry was shown in the speech of Edgar Ross to the same Congress:

We recognise the truth of what comrade Dixon told us at the discussion yesterday [a fraction meeting of communists drawn from the Miner's Federation, P.D.I.] that coal may well be the key to the Party's fight against reaction, that coal is a weapon, and that we must see that it is our weapon in ensuring that the mining union plays a more and more decisive role in the big issues, against crisis and war, the defeat of reaction.... (Deery, p. 38.)

L. Sharkey (who became General Secretary at this Congress) told the delegates that:

The time has come when we must take a bolder political stand in the trade unions.... The question of the relation of the trade unions to the Labor Party has been raised. There is, or was, a conception in our Party that this is the way to build the United Front. To affiliate the trade unions to the reformist party obviously strengthens reformist ideology and leads to the belief that the ALP is the true party of the workers....it is clear that we cannot pursue a policy that strengthens the reformist grip over the trade union masses. (Deery, p. 35.)

A federal election was due at the end of 1949 and this was the subject of the main report given by R. Dixon to a meeting of the CPA Central Committee in February 1949; in part, he said:

The Communist Party is entering the election campaign in a very big way, as the working class alternative to the other parties. In the 1943 election our slogan was for the return of the Labour Government and the election of communists. That was during the people's war. In 1946 our slogan was for the defeat of the Liberal and Country parties and the election of communists. In this election our basic slogan must be the election of communists to Parliament and the organisation of the people to struggle for the programme of the Communist Party.

We are entering the federal elections with 76 candidates. Such a large team was dictated by the political situation confronting us, a situation which makes it necessary to present the Communist Party as the real alternative to the present government.

... we must combat the theory that the Labour Government is the lesser evil to a Liberal or Country Party Government.... We lose thousands of votes in elections because of the lesser evil theory....

Insofar as the Liberal, Labour and Country Parties are concerned, it is necessary to say that whilst they do differ on many issues, these differences, with very few exceptions, relate to details and not principles. In principle, these three parties aim to strengthen capitalism and weaken the working class movement. They strive to promote monopoly and imperialist policies.

On all these issues ... the Labour Party is at one with the Liberal and Country Parties. Only in minor details do they differ.

It is an illusion to believe that the Labour Party is a lesser evil...

In the elections we must carry on not merely a propaganda campaign. Our aim is the organisation of mass struggles for the policy we put forward, to develop struggles against rising prices, for higher wages, in defence of peace and democratic rights. (Communist Review, February 1949, pp. 108-110.)

At the same (February 1949) meeting of the Central Committee, Sharkey said:

...On all of the major questions the Labour Party is in the camp of the bourgeoisie.

I do not think it presents any mystery, we simply go out and tell the working class that we are the party of the working class—not the reformists.... In the coming period, our aim is to liquidate reformism as the decisive policy in the working class movement.

These quotations are necessary to document the formation and nature of the strategy of the Communist Party in the 1949 coal strike.

Having commenced his documentary story of the strike with an extract from a speech by Blake, Phillip Deery concludes his account with a long quote from a 'pamphlet' by Blake which reads in part:
The coal strike was of tremendous importance for the Australian working class. Firstly, the workers secured in this struggle invaluable lessons on the true role of Labor Governments (and) the ALP leadership...

Secondly, (it) established the fact that the arbitration system has been made into a vicious bludgeon against the working class by the Labor Governments...

Thirdly, the coal strike demonstrated that great working class victories can be won even though specific economic claims are not secured in the course of the strike...

Fourthly, the defence of unionism and the rights of unionists to regulate and determine their own affairs has now become a matter of first-rate importance for the whole Australian working class...

Finally, the conditions have been created for developing the fighting, united front of the working class. It is the great responsibility of all communists to help the Labor Party workers fully to grasp the lessons to be learned from the coal strike. The Labor Party workers must never be lumped together with their right wing leaders. These workers will more rapidly move over to the banner of united working class struggle to the extent that the communists show vigour and understanding in organising and developing this united front.... (Deery, pp. 98-99.)

As Deery justly observes:

Unfortunately for the Communist Party, only communists themselves and a handful of trade union militants understood these lessons. Workers' attachment to the ALP was confirmed by the coal strike, not weakened, and reformism was not exposed but emerged triumphant... (Deery, p. 99.)

Deery is not wholly accurate as to the provenance of this final statement on the strike. It was a report prepared by me in consultation with the full party secretariat (Sharkey, Dixon and Henry), submitted to and endorsed by a meeting of the Political Committee of the CPA in August, and published in the Communist Review, September 1949. An article by R. Dixon printed in the Communist Review, October 1949, contains the same conclusions.

As to my actual participation in the coal strike, I was brought to Sydney from Melbourne towards the end of July on the instruction of the Political Committee (the reason given for this was that communist leading work in the strike was in a bad way: Dixon was abroad, Sharkey had just been sentenced to a term of imprisonment and
Henry was occupied with special work.) On the night of my arrival in Sydney, I was taken to a meeting of the Political Committee (Dixon and Healy were absent) which collectively briefed me on my responsibilities: mobilise the resources of the Communist Party to strengthen the fighting spirit of the miners, develop publicity and counter the widespread anti-strike propaganda, develop moral and financial support for the miners; in brief, to strengthen the front and continue the strike.

I did my best in the final two weeks of the strike to carry out these directions with which I was in full agreement. At the time it seemed to me, and I think to the others present, that the meeting of the Political Committee was devoted to a real estimation of the strike situation. In fact, it was not. The main thrust of the discussion — prolongation of the strike — was not questioned by anyone. Had the real situation been examined, the conclusion would have been reached that it was time to terminate the strike — but then there would have been no need to bring me from Melbourne had that been the case.

However, the attribution of culpability to individual communist leaders is a pointless exercise. (The documents, in fact, show clearly general agreement on the line in 1949.) It may serve the purpose of some transient factional interest, but the exercise diverts attention from the real problems which lie deeper and continue to produce similar effects.

No single criterion suffices to provide a definitive answer to questions about communist attitudes to the Labor Party, but an examination of the times when the Labor Party formed the government and a comparison with those times when it formed the opposition might provide a useful guide.

For a long time, certainly from 1927 on, there were two articles of faith which were crucial to the thinking of an Australian communist: first, the idea that the Labor Party was a 'bourgeois' party or a 'two-class' party; second, that the Communist Party must so regulate its activity as to win the majority of the workers from the reformist ideology of the Labor Party to the revolutionary ideology of the Communist Party. Throughout all the permutations of the united-front tactics, and all the perceptions of the Labor Party as a 'two-class' or 'bourgeois' party, the aim of winning the majority of the workers away from the ALP to the Communist Party was never in question; the only question was how — what were the correct tactics? Hence, an insistence on the importance of the united front with the Labor Party or with Labor Party workers (non-sectarian) could go hand-in-hand with the most violent denunciations of Labor Party reformism (sectarianism).

The conception of the Labor Party as a 'bourgeois' or a 'two-class' party still governed the approach to these matters in the mid-1960s. Discussing relations with the Communist Party of New Zealand in the Communist Review, January-February 1965, R. Dixon wrote:

What else do we mean except the character of the Labor Party when we speak of it as a 'two-class party'?... In the pamphlet... both terms are used interchangeably. It is a bourgeois labour party with its mass basis in the working class. At present, ....the crucial problem for our parties therefore, is: how to win the majority of the workers from their support for reformism to support for socialism.

At various times the notion of a united working class party — combining the ALP and the CPA — has been advanced as the preferred solution to the contradictory approaches to the united front inherent in the perception of the ALP as a 'two-class' party, or a 'bourgeois' labor party. But the insistence that this new united party must be a revolutionary marxist-leninist party indicated that the solution was only in words. The question was begged: the problem remained.

The source of the problem, it seems to me, should be sought in the basic strategy of the Communist Party, which was modelled on the Russian revolution; the working class under the leadership of the Communist Party would carry through a political revolution, conquer state power, socialise the means of production and proceed to the establishment of socialism. Because the 'bourgeois' Labor Party had the support of the majority of the working class, the exposure and isolation of the reformist Labor Party was an essential part of the process whereby the majority of the workers shifted over to the revolutionary position of the Communist Party.
Strikes were seen as bringing workers into class struggle, away from the influence of reformism and towards revolutionary politics. The 1949 coal strike was a good example of our exaggerated estimation of the revolutionising significance of strikes; also of our one-sided appraisal of strikes vis-a-vis other actions of the people.

Most strikes are, in fact, an essential part of the struggle workers must conduct in the market place to maintain and improve their material situation within the system. The right to strike on political issues is a right trade unionists insist upon; but such strikes will succeed to the extent that they represent, and develop, the political culture and awareness of the workers concerned, not only that of their leaders and most conscious members.

Communist strategy as it related to the Labor Party originated with Lenin. For almost two decades this strategy enabled the Communist Party to have a strong influence within Australian life. In the great depression, communists were in the forefront as organisers of the unemployed — rallying them for struggle. They were the moving force in lifting the trade unions out of the doldrums caused by ineffectual reformist leadership; they won many positions in trade unions, improved the efficiency of the unions and raised their fighting spirit.

The Communist Party carried on constant educational work on the menace of fascism; in the general democratic, anti-fascist struggle against naziism in Germany, against Franco in Spain, and against reactionary attacks on democracy in Australia, the Communist Party set the tone and can claim the main credit for inspiring the anti-fascist and anti-war movements in the decade of the thirties. These were significant accomplishments which attained their high point during World War II when the major role of the Soviet Union in the defeat of world fascism merged with Australia's national interests.

These very successes were partly responsible for concealing from us the one-sided and misleading nature of the basic strategy — its unawareness of areas of decisive importance. Fundamental political and social transformation required work in a much wider area: the area of the value-system of the people, how their values change, how struggles for changed social and cultural values may penetrate the political realm, the system of political parties
and organisations and their various alignments — in short, the promotion of a new cultural hegemony of the rising class.

When the Communist Party saw the areas where it had won its greatest strength as opening the road to political power, it was confronted by a tenacious hegemony against which it imagined it had been influential; it found itself pressed to the outside of the main political process. The revelations of stalinism offered an opportunity for critical reassessment and orientation in 1956 but the opportunity was rejected.

The experience we did not properly examine (our historical past from post-1917 to the 20th Congress of the CPSU) shows that the class cannot be pressured or forced into revolution. Hegemony, the cultural-political ascendancy of the class in the nation, is essential for the revolutionary transformation of the social order; this is hegemony of the class, not the Party.

The Lenin strategy, based on the realities of tsarist Russia, was misleading for communists in Australia; it said that the workers were misled into reformism and held back from revolution by the reformist leaders of the Labor Party who were the purveyors of bourgeois ideology in the labour movement — the labour lieutenants of the bourgeoisie. This conception narrows to an unreal degree the manner in which bourgeois ideology permeates the working class. Bourgeois ideology is the pervasive hegemonic influence of the prevailing social order; the Labor Party is as much influenced by the working class under this hegemonic sway, as it is the purveyor of that influence to the class. Descriptions of the Labor Party as a 'bourgeois' party led to wrong conclusions as to what is needed if the prevailing bourgeois hegemony is to be replaced by the cultural-political hegemony of the rising class, the working class, or today the new workforce in process of class formation — which includes its own cultural growth.

Real change has to take place in the workforce, change which encompasses a growing consciousness of the need for a more human social order and way of living, not a 'socialist' mirror-image of capitalist consumerism. Such changes are more likely to be multiform rather than linear, involving new movements as well as changes in such established organisations of the working class as the trade unions and the Labor Party. In our specific Australian conditions, the leninist conception in the long run placed the Communist Party in the position of an exterior force, not merely in the sense of being guided by conceptions which had only partial relevance to our conditions, but more importantly as a force seeking to change the Australian labour movement from the outside rather than the inside; it placed us outside the organic development of the class. To reverse this process does not reduce down to dichotomies such as whether to be a mass party or a ginger group, whether or not to criticise this or that bourgeois practice of Labor Party leaders. It means being on the inside, not external to, the class. It means perceiving everything from the position of the class rather than from narrow party interest; discerning the future in the class as it presently is, not invented or imposed but as it is manifested in the movements of the class itself.

Formation of revolutionary strategy in our conditions needs to begin with the fact that the vast majority of the workforce is firmly embedded in the bourgeois-democratic context of modern Australian life and that revolutionary change here is likely to assume a distinctive character, one big difference being that it will be a prolonged process — a long revolution rather than a knockout blow. In Australian conditions the transforming process evidently will involve more or less fundamental reforms. Not only should our revolutionary movement support reforms, it should be an active initiator of reforms as reforms and engage in the struggle for them. The conscious struggle for reforms is part of the transition to a new awareness — a new hegemony. Until revolutionaries overcome their distrust of reforms as a co-opting plague, they are unlikely in our conditions to advance beyond fragmentary fringe sects.

One cannot portray and project the future in the present unless one is positively tied in to the present, with motives that are not ulterior but completely interior to the ongoing movement.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHILDREN'S YEAR
1979

The 'Me Generation', Consumerism and Age-ism

Ruth & Maurie Crow


Judging by the first leaflets produced by the Victorian Government's I.Y.C. Committee, such committees will tend to confine "Children's Year" to sentimental and trivial activities. But, like International Women's Year (I.W.Y.) 1975, the campaign around "Children's Year" is beginning to have a life of its own. All sorts of community groups are initiating their own plans for strengthening and extending their activities during Children's Year and new links between organisations are developing.

There are today many examples of people coming together and affirming the worth of human relationships and helping to establish a sense of community. The challenge of Children's Year is to recognise the historic significance of these continual humanising efforts; but in order to do this it is necessary to examine the factors which tend to dehumanise the relationships between the younger generation and the adults. (1)

At the Women and Labor Conference in May 1978, Eva Cox delivered a paper entitled "Beware the Call of Nature"; she warned

The cumulative experiences of the last centuries have produced children who are adapted to an acquisitive, individualistic society. The last two decades since the Second World War have produced young adults who are, perhaps, even too self-indulgent for capitalism... Many have grown up into highly privatised individuals who are family centred and have little concern for the world about
Reproduction of labor power

Before examining the conditions which are producing such dehumanising relations, it is useful to summarise the role of the family under capitalism. The commodity produced in the home is the living human being...the future people who will be the future workforce. The family has the function of maintaining and reproducing labor power. The family is a centre of conditioning, of consumption; it is also a reserve of labor, but its essential feature is for the social production of labor power.

The home and its immediate community (school, library and so on) are part of capitalist organisation...part of the social relationships of capitalism. The structure of the family and the relationships within it and extending from it are determined by the needs of the economic system for a certain kind of workforce.

The privatisation of the family tends to hide the exploitation of women and children, separates families from each other, separates women and children from those who are more obviously exploited. Thus, it hinders their struggle against their own exploitation. However, in the last decade, women have begun to find each other and to challenge these barriers. The participants in these challenges have been able to turn their disadvantages into advantages to the extent that they have been able to confront the state much more directly than those who rely on established organisations to intervene and mediate. Precisely because it was not bound by the limits of the traditional ways of struggling against capitalist exploitation, the struggle against sexist oppression developed as flexible and autonomous movements.

Children are suffering from similar oppression and in various ways are taking their own type of rebel action. They are rebelling against the discipline of school and the type of education provided; at the same time, refusing to accept the definition that capitalism gives to their age. It is becoming increasingly difficult to explain to children the arbitrary point at which they reach adulthood. Today, children are faced with the contradiction between their subordination in the home, the school and the community which is lengthening their period of dependency on adults, and the popular cult of teenage independence. For example, in our car-dependent suburbs many children's activities outside the home are confined by the need for parents to be chauffeurs, and chauffeuring becomes chaperoning. At the same time, the TV and other media treat children as if they are fully responsible consumers. Many other similar conflicting values can be cited from every day experience.

Truancy, leaving home, shoplifting, taking drugs, disappointing their parents' ambitions for them, are all reflections of an individualised revolt by children against the intolerable confusion of values imposed on them.

Daily, children face the contradiction between the proclaimed ideal of nuclear family life and the social pressures that convert the former values of the family into articles of common purchase. The bitterness of the breakdown of personal relations helps to obscure the social and political causes of such aberrant behaviour.

The ideal nuclear family versus the pressures of society

The "me generation", "consumerism" and "age-ism" are words recently coined to describe some of the dehumanised relationships between adults and children. A brief examination of these words will help to indicate the conditions under which children are being reared. The words apply to all age groups, but the context to keep in mind in this article is that of children.

The term the Me generation — borrowed by Eva Cox in her paper — is applied to those who expect and seek material rewards and care little for those cast out by the system...like the unemployed. On the one hand, they reject duty and hard work, thus upsetting those in power; on the other hand, they seek individual gratification, not social change. Even the rebels today are often rebelling individually. Tom Wolfe in a recent article described them as the Me generation and quotes as an example the new consciousness movement which seeks changes internally rather than externally, and escape from dullness in drugs, meditation and self-analysis. Although there are many exceptions, there seems more acceptance of individualism and self-interest as a right, much of the rhetoric of liberation...
It seems as if, although such people want liberation, they are fettered by the limitations of their own upbringing, and thus accept individualism as a poor substitute.

*Consumerism* describes the phenomenon of conspicuous waste being made possible through sophisticated advertising and modern technology. The privatism of our suburbs (where most children are reared) assists market attempts to foist on to everyone a lifestyle which expects each family to own privately the goods and services which were supplied in the past and could be supplied today, even more effectively, by the community for community use.

Within the family, the turning in on itself around privatised but unsatisfactory pursuits of *consumerism* negate opportunities "to devote efforts and talents to the service of humanity". This is aggravated by the ties between family and the surrounding community being weakened because the neighbourhood is made up of people influenced by similar conditions.

No wonder "me" becomes the focus where there is no "we" with whom to identify!

This lack of elementary communication and practical neighbourly relationships is made all the more difficult by the growth of *age-ism*. This is a similar type of oppression to "sexism". The stereotyping of people by age can be just as oppressive as sex stereotyping, and it is not merely a passing cultural fashion. The burden of age-ism is not confined to children, but children suffer most because age-ism warps the relationship between child and child, and between the child and other generations. Its effects are not merely transitory, but can shape the attitudes of the younger generation throughout life.

Age-ism flourishes in the conditions provided for rearing children in these modern times — conditions which are beyond the control of the individual family, and thus cannot be challenged by those who are limited in their vision of humanity by the *Me generation* type of consciousness.

At the risk of oversimplifying the situation, two examples of factors...
contributing to age-ism are:

Firstly, there are changes in demography. The size of Australian families now is typically two children with less than three years between births. Under such circumstances, children have few opportunities, within the family, to care for and share with each other. There tends to be rivalry for parental attention rather than learning to cope with frustration.

Secondly, children are too often locked into a situation where there is an over-commitment to mothering, depriving them of learning independence and self-reliance. Diminishing family size and the changing technology of housework reduces the creative responsibilities of the mother. Parents deprived of feeling that they are really useful, often feel threatened by a child's growing independence, and there develops a tendency to emphasize the roles of the generations in order to maintain a dominant position in the family. The solution to this cannot be found only by consciously trying to make a better adjustment within the home.

These two examples mainly concern conditions within the nuclear family circle; in real life situations, the home cannot be separated from the urban environment. For example, the design of our urban areas is conducive to the stratification of the population into age and income groups. Especially is this so in the car-based suburbs of the period since the second world war, where neighbourhoods housing nuclear families generally have a deficiency of young adults and elderly people.

In the book Access for All (by K.H. Schaeffer and Elliot Sclar, Penguin 1975), there is this description of the car-based suburb:

The absence of the aged cheats the child of exposure to how other people live, the absence of young adults makes the neighbourhood teenagers unusually cocksure of themselves. These teens see only adults to whom they do not relate, and youngsters over whom they can lord. If young adults are present, a natural pecking order develops. Here, for each child or teenager there is someone just a bit older and more mature, a natural big brother or sister. (p. 109)

Children suffer from other disadvantages in our car-dominated suburbs, and the examples given merely indicate the social nature of the problem.

Consumerism accentuates cash nexus family relationships

Our over-dependence on private transport is typical of the misuse of technology and the wicked squandering of the world's scarce resources. At the 1974 National Congress of the Communist Party of Australia, the Resolution on Women and Social Liberation recognised the relationship between the energy crisis and the liberation of women and children. It stated:

Australian capitalism reinforces the traditional and archaic and outdated roles of women and children in new ways. The market foists on to everyone a lifestyle which wastes much of the ample resources now available; partly expecting everyone to own privately what was previously better supplied by the community and partly by high pressure selling of all types of commodities with rapidly changing fashions based on built in obsolescence. This emphasizes individual competition within stereotyped sex and age roles in a more virulent form than ever before, thus perpetuating in new styles the sex and class division of labor. Besides squandering material and energy which unnecessarily damage the environment, such enforced "consumerist" lifestyles accentuated the "cash nexus" relationship between women, men and children and diverts people's labor away from social and co-operative efforts to assist the liberation of women and children.

Fusing deepest personal needs with broad social issues

Many groups of people are becoming quite precise in presenting alternatives to the me generation, consumerism and age-ism. They are trying to ensure that the future will not reproduce the anachronisms of the present expressed in the prevailing ideas that cars are the most prized form of transport; that community and neighbourhood are no longer significant; that the bigger the school, sports centre or hospital the better; that there is no suburban isolation but only unhappy and poorly adjusted people; and that the unemployed are "dole bludgers".
Such groups see the antidote to the *me generation* and *consumerism* as the provision of opportunities for recreating community where at present little exists.

Such alternatives are beginning to take practical form as more and more people are taking the future into their own hands by setting up community-based children’s centres, community health centres, food cooperatives, shop-front drop-in centres and numerous other do-it-yourself centres. Intertwined with these groups are movements concerned about the environment, for example the Environmentalists for Full Employment, the Conservation of Urban Energy Group. (5)

Such organisations and movements will continue to be frail and easily discouraged unless there begins to develop a vision into which these small-scale human efforts can be dovetailed.

**A vision of the future and the process of creating community**

*International Year of the Child provides an opportunity for an overall vision to begin being projected and for all sorts of diverse organisations to link together to achieve some immediate gains towards realising specific goals.*

The 1974 CPA Resolution on “Women and Social Liberation” described the communist alternative in the following words:

Communists thus face the need to fight for a society which expropriates the wealthy owners and controllers of the means of production, ends the division of labor based on sex and ensures for women full control over their own bodies. Such a society would develop social and co-operative ownership of the main resources, means of production, other economic institutions and mass communications media and develop social and co-operative means for housework and the development of the social and moral attitudes and behaviour of children. (4)

Thus the Communist Party already has a very precise long-term view on the liberation of women and children. The task, however, is to relate this to the movements which are already moving towards this future. There are, in embryo, various “social and co-operative efforts which are striving for better “social and moral attitudes”.

The term “the process of creating community” is one way that this new type of value judgement is now being described by some of those involved in such movements. At present such movements are not introducing elements of socialism in Australia, but in many ways they are challenging the hegemony of the ruling class....proposing and organising alternatives to the private upbringing of children....trying to ensure community control of family support services....making community plans for restructuring urban areas so that there is less dependence on the private car for transport.

These are but a few samples of the new types of challenge to the political and economic powers of the capitalist state.

**Neighbourhood spirit and male domination**

Historically, of course, there have been plenty of examples of independent community effort involving women, even exclusively involving women in Australia; for example, there are mothers’ clubs, women’s sporting clubs, auxiliaries to unions, social clubs attached to sporting teams, the Housewives’ Association and the Country Women’s Association. These have tended to be peripheral to, or at least emerge from, existing established organisations — the male-dominated education, sporting, cultural, industrial, social or political movements. Most of the examples listed were originally based on a pre-existing neighbourhood spirit; people already knew each other before joining and joined because of having an already existing identity with the particular effort as part of their neighbourhood.

Until recently, even in scattered farming areas, people would know each other’s performance personally or by repute. The same applied to miners and factory workers who lived near their work places, and this knowledge of each other spread to women and children.

But the current conditions of Australian suburban life have tended to evaporate the former natural stores of respect and appreciation of neighbours for each other. The excessive mobility of private transport and the excessive privatisation arising from
life's satisfactions being purchased commodities, rather than organised effort or social participation, means that neighbours, literally, do not know each other. Even if they are "nodding acquaintances", they are most likely quite ignorant of each other’s problems or capacities; and this condition applies to men as well as women and children.

So the phrase The process of creating community does not describe some historically age-old process. It is an entirely fresh task arising from new conditions of consumerism and privatisation.

No pre-existing model

Therefore, there is no pre-existing model on how to enter into the process of creating community. This means that people participating in these new movements are forging new human relationships and changing themselves as they change their circumstances in new ways. The "sense of the new" or the "spirit of the collective" may seem rather striving terms to use to describe these newly emerging relationships; nevertheless, whatever words are used, it is very important to see the humanising effect of participating in new challenges; women are the ones who predominate in these new spheres of political activity, and the involvement of women is likely to have an effect on the way children are reared.

Evelyn Reed claims that women were the first "humanisers". (6) She writes:

As Engels demonstrated, it was through productive activities that mankind arose out of the animal world. More concretely, then, it was the female half of humanity who initiated and led in these productive activities and who may therefore be credited with the major share of this great act of creation and elevation of humanity.

It could well be that in their autonomous struggles to liberate themselves from the oppression of the privatisation of the home, women and children are finding new ways to relate to each other and contribute to social changes in ways which have never before been chartered.

One of the newly coined words which is used to describe these new relationships is the word "collective".

A useful definition of the word "collective" has been made by the Community Child Care Organisation in Melbourne: (7)

Community Child Care uses the word "collective" rather than the word "interact". The reason for doing this is to emphasize that in participatory efforts like community child care, people have found that they can do together what they are unable to do as individuals. A collective is much more than a group of people acting as individuals.

A Collective means a team of people, for which since there is a common purpose, there begins to develop a spirit of each contributing as best she or he can, some with one kind of skill, others with different skills, but all with a quickening appreciation of each other, all teaching and learning from each other, all developing a greater awareness and communication of common aims.

The Community Child Care article goes on to answer the critics who deride such organisations by calling them "middle class":

This is not the place to enter into a theoretical discussion on "class". However, it is worth noting that, in our society, there are certain values which are traditionally recognised as being "individualistic", "competitive" and "personally ambitious". By contrast, the essential features of a "collective" correspond with what has been recognised as the "working class" ethic of "from each according
to their ability and to each according to their need"...It is inevitable that some of those who are initiating such movements as Community Child Care have had opportunities for tertiary education. This does not necessarily imprison them or their ideas within the values ascribed as "middle class". Anyone, irrespective of class, can only effectively take part in strengthening community, through the process of working collectively. To take part in a collective, it is necessary to "unlearn" competitive and aggressive ambitions, workstyles and to re-learn co-operation and caring accountability.

This indicates that some community organisations are not only concerned about the practical day-to-day tasks of establishing new types of facilities, but that part of this involvement leads to an analysis of the nature of the changes in moral and social attitudes which are so essential if any permanent gains are to be made in changing the social conditions for child-rearing.

It also shows that those who are searching for answers on these social issues are beginning to recognise that, historically, the working class movement has been in the forefront of the challenge to the prevailing inhuman values of capitalism.

For the left, one of the main challenges of Children's Year is to find ways of gearing traditional organisations of the working class to the newly emerging movements around the environment and the community.

In order to meet this challenge, it is necessary to consider three specific Australian conditions which affect the way these new links will be forged.

Three conditions specific to Australia

1. Strong trade unions.
2. Suburbanisation.
3. Domination of national politics.

1. Strong trade unions

To date, the link between trade unions and community groups has been mainly at the level of protest (eg, support for pensioners, green bans, anti-uranium). However, there are indications that trade unions are beginning to participate in various campaigns for a more human urban environment.

One of the factors which makes it difficult for trade unions to embrace some of the new types of movements is that, traditionally, unions have dealt with standards (of wages and conditions and so on) which can be separated out and sharply defined and have measurable solutions which are usually expressed in economic terms. Some of the new issues are inherently different, they are not easily defined in words which have currently accented meaning. (8)

For example, in many of these groups, emphasis is placed on the word "process". This is particularly so for organisations concerned about the "process of creating community".

The trade unions are already considering
campaigns on how workers on the job can have more control over their lives and over the products that they make. This is leading to strong links with some of the environmental organisations, but to date, links with community organisations and the presentation of ideas about alternative community services by trade unionists is still at a much more primitive stage.

Where links are being made between trade unions and local community groups, there is likely to be much more involvement of women in the trade unions and some of the more patriarchal methods of work of trade unionists may be modified.

Unlike trade unions, community organisations are not directly connected to production (in this sense, they are structurally secondary) and this means that they tend to be easily co-opted. The strong trade union movement with its strong ties in the workplace is an asset which could have very significant value to the community and conservation groups. A framework already exists for linking campaigns around welfare, unemployment, child care, health, transport, education, housing and other matters which affect daily life. One particular aspect of urban policies which has largely been neglected by both trade unions and community groups is the relationship between social activities, land use and transport; but there are indications that a popular movement is bringing together a number of diverse groups around this issue and some trade unions are involved in it.

2. Suburbanisation

Australia is one of the most suburbanised countries in the world with 80 per cent of our population living in large cities.

The suburban development functions perfectly smoothly for the investment of capital, the domination of centralised government, the stimulation of commodity consumption, the differential production of labor power and the maintenance of social order.

What is ideal for the corporations, however, is not ideal for the suburban family.

The problems of suburban life for women is more than loneliness, isolation, lack of stimulation and inappropriate support services. (9) The increase in baby bashing, drug abuse, suicide, and such “crimes” are symptoms of the breakdown in human relationships in Australia where consumerism is the inseparable twin of sexist oppression.

In the car-dependent suburbs, the family turns in on itself. The aged, children and women are trapped in the suburbs where community life is declining and women bear the increased burden of the “invisible work” needed to provide the compensatory private life centred on the car and home.

Such conditions tend to generate feelings of anomie...of having insatiable ambitions which can never be fulfilled. These anomic feelings are further aggravated by the family’s dependence on professional services over which it has little control.

The antidote to anomie is the opportunity to participate in helping to recreate community and in being able to re-establish control of personal relationships.

In some respects, the relationship of anomie to the process of creating community is similar to the relationship between alienation and solidarity. Solidarity is the antidote to being treated as a commodity. In real life, there is no clear cut distinction between anomie and alienation and the challenge in the future is to find some way of linking the movement based on solidarity with the movement based on the process of creating community.

3. Domination of national politics

There are many reasons why movements around state and municipal governments play such a secondary role to the movement around our federal government.

Many of the progressive campaigns have a national or international importance: the campaign for disarmament, the campaign to ban uranium are two obvious examples.

However, an over-concentration by progressive forces at the national level can mean that campaigns at the local and state levels are neglected. There is the contradiction that although in the past those who challenged capitalism have spearheaded the move to national organisations (eg, national trade unions, pensioners’ associations, campaigns on education and so
on), the moves to establish national organisations of some of the newly emerging progressive organisations, such as environmental organisations and child care and welfare organisations, is coming from the federal Fraser government.

This enticement is recognised by some as an attempt to decapitate virile state and local organisations and to dissipate strength.

Rather than divert from local grassroots efforts in the localities, it may be best to consider how to use the strength of the already existing national organisations, rather than proliferate effort and run the risk of the new types of organisations being bureaucratised.

The move to prematurely federalise some groups could make it easy for elitism to tame cat and co-opt them and this would be an intolerable setback to many of these fragile organisations.

The strong national organisations of the trade unions can provide a well tested operative national framework through which some of the efforts for creating community could be popularised and, in the process, new links forged between unions and community and environment groups.

Thus, emphasising the need to consider campaigns at the local and state level does not mean the rejection of the need for some connections with national political processes.

In practice, one of the most significant effects of campaigns on local issues is that urban daily life is transformed so that more and more people, particularly women, can be partisans on national issues and have meaningful connections with politics at local, state and federal levels.

The trade unions would also become more meaningful through such a process, particularly to women — both women in the workplace and women who spend most of their waking hours in the suburban home.

However, the main purpose of concentrating on local activities by working around alternatives is not to gain political power in the context of the parliamentary democratic structure, although it is conceivable that such success in some circumstances could help forward the extra parliamentary movement. The main emphasis is on a vision of a practical alternative enabling a more human lifestyle.

The struggle to implement such an alternative is a necessary prerequisite for the inevitable expansion of such struggle to form part of the experience necessary for Australian people (men, women and children) to carve out their own path to socialism...creating their own organisations in the process.

Children's Year or Year of the Child

The title officially chosen for the 1979 United Nations Year. The Year of THE CHILD objectifies children.

In 1975 there would have been an outcry if the United Nations had called it The Year of THE WOMAN...One way of rejecting the ageist attitude implied in the chosen title is to use the title Children's Year.

However, a change in title is only tokenism unless Children's Year campaigns tackle the social conditions which are determining child-rearing practices in the home and in the community. The women's movement in 1975 was able to use the United Nations Year as an opportunity to deepen understanding about the nature of sexist oppression.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child is being popularised as the basis for action around Children's Year. (10) As previously stated, one of the principles of this declaration states that "the child should be brought up in the full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men (sic)."

Despite the sexist overtones and the ageism implied in this Principle (these words were more acceptable when the Declaration was first proclaimed), the Principle clearly states the idea of socialising children to acknowledge their own responsibility to devote their talents to serving humanity.

One of the challenges of Children's Year is to consider what this involves.

Of course, much of the initiative and planning of campaigns during 1979 will be the direct responsibility of adults. However, if ageism is to be seriously challenged, then part of adult responsibility is to develop a movement in which children can participate
in their own right and in their own style. There are many starting points for the development of broad movements of children, men and women; for example:

Children's Year could provide the opportunity for initiating particular projects or happenings such as making films, holding concerts and other celebrations and conferences

or

Some groups may mainly concentrate on fostering international friendship and an understanding of the need for peace

or

The focus could be on lobbying the various governments for more adequate and more appropriate family support systems; for example, community controlled child care

or

Some organisations may highlight the conditions under which children live in our urban areas and include such campaigns as the need for free travel on public transport, or the need for urban areas to be planned so that facilities are clustered and thus more readily accessible to pedestrians. (10)

All such campaigns are admirable. But if they are left as separate efforts, there will be little lasting change made to the social conditions under which children are reared; even an involvement of children in these campaigns will not necessarily lead to any permanent results. Such campaigns, waged in isolation from each other, will not really challenge the hegemony of capitalism.

Children's Year can result in lasting gains for the movement for social change if strong links are developed between unions, community groups and environmental groups. If, in the process of forging these links, new styles of work are fostered which are not sexist and not age-ist and which are based on collectives and not on paternalistic bureaucracies, then children can find their own way to be involved with adults around issues which affect all human beings.

The identification of the cause of age-ism is the essential first step towards achieving this end.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Australian Conservation Foundation has published an article “The Year of the Child; What will it mean to Australians?” Habitat, Vol. 6, No. 6, December 1978. This is an example of how an organisation which is primarily concerned with environmental issues is calling for support for changing our child-rearing practices.

2. Eva Cox's paper has been published by Social Alternatives, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1978 (Department of External Studies, University of Queensland).

3. The phrase “to devote efforts and talents to the service of humanity” is quoted from the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This important charter has been summarised for I.Y.C. and in the summary parts of the “Principles” which relate to socialising children, have been deleted. For further information on the way the official I.Y.C. campaign has sidestepped the most important part of the Declaration, see article in Learning Exchange, No. 72, December 1978 (432 Waverley Rd, E. Malvern, 3145) or Esoso Exchange, No. 68, October 1978 (Box 87, Carlton Sth.).

4. The full text of the resolution has been published in the C.P.A. Documents of the Seventies, available at Communist Party bookshops in all states.

5. In Melbourne the first meeting of Environmentalists for Full Employment was called by several conservation groups (for example, the Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth) and several unions (for example, A.M.S.W.U.). It has been endorsed by a number of unions.

Chain Reaction, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1977 published a report about this first meeting (obtainable from Friends of the Earth, 366 Smith St, Collingwood, 3066). The Conservation of Urban Energy Group has recently published Seed for Change which proposes some ways for restructuring urban areas and conserving our natural resources. Seed for Change is now available in bookshops.

6. Problems of Women's Liberation...A Marxist Approach by Evelyn Reed, published by Merit Publisher (USA), 1969.

7. Quotes from Community Child Care, Information Paper entitled Searching for Answers on Child Care. The article was republished for the 1977 Campus Child Care Conference in Melbourne in Child Care...A Collection of Articles, available from the Australian Union of Students. The Information Paper is available from Community Child Care, 191 Brunswick St, Fitzroy.
REDUCTIONS OF THE SOCIAL WAGE

Within a month, the federal government will bring down the 1979-80 budget. It won't seem to be quite such a horrific budget as were those brought down in 1977 and 1978, because the press has made a point of the recently increased revenue from the excise duty on crude oil, and because workers in particular have come to anticipate horror budgets from the Liberal-National Country Party government. Most workers are only too well aware of the government's attempts to reduce the real value of take-home pay during the past three years. But workers' standards of living have declined with or without any reductions in real wages. A worker's social wage includes more than take-home pay: it includes a variety of "social services" provided by the state. And reductions in the provision of "social services" have been as much a characteristic of the two Fraser governments as have been their efforts to reduce the real value of the wages bill. Broadly, the reasons for the reduction of the social wage are the federal government's concern to bolster rates of profit throughout the economy, its concern over a real or imagined budgetary crisis, and its concern to repudiate expectations built up within the working class during the earlier Whitlam years that the power of the state is accessible to workers.

In recent years, in the United Kingdom in particular, the term "social wage" has attained popular usage. The social wage includes more than "take-home pay": it includes also the value to a worker of services provided by the state — by federal and state governments. For each worker it includes a share in the value of public housing, urban development projects, public passenger transport, health care facilities, education, and the variety of pensions and allowances available under the provisions of the so-called welfare state. The idea behind adding the values of these services to wage payments as conventionally understood is that they are important components of the basic standard of living and would have to be financed by workers themselves out of money wages if they were not provided by the state. So, for example, the cost of supporting people retired from the workforce would have to be borne by the working sons and daughters of aged people if there were no old-age pension.

Insofar as the state has taken over part of the cost of supporting workers and their families, the employing corporations have been able to pay lower wages than they would otherwise have had to pay to ensure the health and compliance of the workforce. Companies have not only been spared directly: the least paid Australian workers have had to contribute proportionately more to the state revenue which finances "public services" than have all other taxpayers other than those with the highest incomes. (1) In other words, provision to workers of non-monetary components of the social wage has largely been at the expense of take-home pay.

The last ALR reported that the share of wages in Australia's national income has declined rapidly over the last couple of years. At the same time, unemployment has increased to the point where there are now at least half a million workers involuntarily unemployed. (2) In what follows, it will become clear — even allowing for considerable caution in interpreting the figures — that, as well, the real value of crucial components of the social wage of employed workers has declined markedly during the period of two Fraser governments.

There are several reasons for caution in interpretation. First, little is known about the distribution of components of the social wage between wage-earners. The middle class may benefit more from much of the state's expenditure on public passenger transport and education, for example, than do workers. (3) During this past financial year, federal expenditure on non-government schools in the six states was
anticipated to increase by 30 per cent over the actual expenditure in 1977-78 to $253.7 million, while expenditure on government schools was expected to decline by 14.3 per cent (in nominal terms!) to $372.4 million (4); and much of the transfer of expenditure was to be to schools for the children of the wealthy rather than to Catholic parochial and diocesan schools. The second reason for caution is that much of state expenditure supports those who administer the various programmes or the likes of medics in private practice. Third, just what expenditure should be regarded as elements of the social wage is not a question to which all people would give the same answer. Fourth, some parts of general revenue grants to the states may be spent on components of the social wage but are not taken into account in the following figures. Notwithstanding the several reasons for caution, however, it is possible to make several firm judgements from the evidence of changes in expenditure.

If budget estimates for 1978-79 turn out to have been accurate, the federal government expenditure or its contributions to the social wage will have decreased by $4.2 billion in real terms during the period 1976-77 to 1978-79 — by $1.2 billion in the first year, by $1.3 billion in the second and by an estimated $1.6 billion in the third. (5) These figures are based on a conservative adjustment for the effect of inflation. It should be noted that they exclude changes in the provision of unemployment benefits but include changes in federal expenditure on various training schemes. Total expenditure on education rose by 5.8 per cent over the three year period; but this increase was very largely accounted for by increased aid to non-government schools. Expenditure on health fell by roughly 30 per cent in real terms each year. Expenditures on urban development and on public housing have been cut even more ruthlessly: public housing, in fact, was expected to receive only $363 million in nominal terms in 1978-79 as compared with $562 million in 1975-76, $349 million in 1976-77 and $507 million in 1977-78. Only expenditure on pensions (excluding unemployment benefits) kept pace with inflation during the period as a whole. Expenditures on health, education, housing, etc. for aborigines in each case declined in real terms, by as much as 92 per cent in the case of community amenities and in no area by less than 29 per cent.

There is no real evidence to suggest that the reductions in the provision of components of the social wage such as health care to workers on lower incomes were matched by reductions in the proportion of income paid in various forms of taxation. It is more likely that federal taxation, overall, became less progressive. According to the federal ALP’s calculation in August 1978, the net effect of the cuts in rates of income tax in February of that year and of the increases introduced in the 1978 budget was to increase the taxation paid by workers earning between $114 and $238 per week, that is by 55 per cent of all tax payers, and to decrease taxation paid on incomes above $238 per week — by as much as $15 per week in incomes of between $500 and $1000. (6) Furthermore, regressive indirect taxes have been raised in successive budgets; and revenue obtained by means of the present excise duty on crude oil has been increased substantially by the rises in the international price of crude oil.

The Australian Financial Review reported on July 16 (1979) that receipts from the duty on crude oil are expected to amount to over $2,000 million during 1979-80, or $800 million more than was anticipated before the most recent of OPEC’s price changes. The Financial Review predicted that the increased revenue might undermine any attempt in the federal cabinet to reduce total payments of old-age pensions and family allowances and to further increase duties on beer, spirits and tobacco, and that it might lead to the removal of the present income tax surcharge. It made no suggestion, however, that expenditure reductions announced in May by the federal treasurer in his “mini-budget” would not be implemented. Those reductions include a further substantial reduction in expenditure on the provision of health care and a reduction in real terms on expenditure on areas of education other than non-government schools and technical and further education. In broad terms, it is simply likely that the increased revenue from a regressive indirect tax will replace the present surcharge on more or less progressive income taxation. (7)

There are three general reasons for the reductions in the federal government’s
contributions to the social wage. First, the cuts deflate expectations that developed within the working class during the period of the Whitlam government (during 1973 and 1974, at any rate) that state power is accessible to workers' movements. The most savage cuts during Fraser's first year as Prime Minister were in just those components of the social wage which were effectively added by the Whitlam government, urban rejuvenation (or development) and the Australian Assistance Plan. As if cuts in the social wage were not enough to remind workers of their place, the federal government has become increasingly blatant in using state power against workers, particularly by way of procedures applying to the receipt of unemployment benefits (and the Department of Social Security was the only department able to finance a large staff after the 1978-79 budget).

Second, rates of profit on private investment had to be increased. To this end, the Fraser government sought to reduce the size of the unproductive part of the public sector and to decrease the rate of surplus value by reducing the social wage, including through its pressure on the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission — the real value of take-home pay. Never mind that the strategy is contradictory: it also depresses rates of profit by restricting the purchasing power of workers and their families. The Fraser strategy has brought about, of itself, an increase in unemployment; and it has further reduced purchasing power to the extent that a reduction in the real value of cash transfers has been a constituent of the reduction in the social wage.

The third reason has been the fiscal crisis of the federal government. Federal expenditures have tended to rise faster than federal taxation has risen. Given the international recession and the anxiety of transnational industrial corporations to relocate their activities in countries in which wages are low, the production of surplus value within Australia was gradually contracting until the recent international boom in the prices of beef and wheat. During the past two years in particular, the federal government exacerbated the insufficiency of the tax base by severely cutting back its own capital expenditure and that of the states. By the same token, it contributed to the scale of unemployment and to the need for expenditure on unemployment benefits (likely to be well over $1 billion during 1978-79). (8) Overseas borrowing was increased dramatically between 1976-77 and 1977-78 (to $1,612 million) and was expected to be in the order of $1,200 million during 1978-79. (9) But overseas borrowing cannot of itself cope with sustained budget deficits, in the first place because the debt has to be serviced by transfers of foreign exchange, which has to be made available from the balance of trade or a net inflow of private capital. (10) In the second place, overseas borrowing unequivocally increases the money supply. But remember that Fraser has been insisting to capitalists, in the manner of Milton Friedman, that responsible economic management by the state requires that the rate of growth of the money supply should be strictly controlled. The problem is that reliance on overseas borrowing may lead to a higher than “responsible” growth of the money supply. Borrowing from whatever source in any case creates yet another claim on current taxation revenue. As already noted, there have been moves to augment revenue; but the more serious moves have been to cut expenditure, and particularly expenditure on components of the social wage.

It is already obvious that the whole ship is being tightened up. One aspect of this tightening up — among many others including greater control of the content of education, tough legislation in the field of industrial relations, and so on — has been the substantial reduction in the social wage. And don’t blame the tightening up on a particularly inhuman Prime Minister, either: it’s the tighter control that the ruling class as a whole requires.


REFERENCES


2. For March 1979, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports 425,000 persons unemployed and seeking work, plus 324,600 persons who are employed but who, while they would take jobs in certain circumstances, are not actively seeking work. Of this latter group, 63,300 have been discouraged from continuing to seek work by their failure in the past to find it. Australian Bureau of
3. No readily available work on the general distribution of elements of the social wage has been done in Australia. The little work that has been done in the U.K. indicates that middle income earners benefit disproportionately. See, e.g., J. Le Grand, "Who Benefits from Public Expenditure?", *New Society*, September 21, 1978.


5. These figures and others on expenditure come from Evan Jones, "Fraser and the Social Wage", *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, No. 5 (July 1979).


7. Increasing proportions of the revenue from the excise duty on crude oil are in effect to be handed over to the oil companies anyway over the next three or four years.


9. Ibid.


**FEDERAL EXPENDITURE ON SOCIAL SERVICES ($ millions)**

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**Notes:**

The original totals have been amended thus: unemployment relief has been subtracted; employment training schemes have been added.

Columns (1), (2) and (5) give actual expenditure in current dollars; column (8) is the budget estimate, also in current dollars.

Columns (3), (4) and (8) show what actual expenditures in current dollars would have been had the real value of 1975-76 allocations been maintained. The index figures 114.4, 125.0 and 134.7 indicate the degrees to which 1975-76 prices had been inflated by the end of each of the three succeeding years.

**Source:** Evan Jones, *op. cit.*
The following interview with Enrique Semo took place at the end of June after he had spoken at a reception in Wollongong. It took up some of the points he raised at the meeting and others which had come up when Semo, a leading figure in the Communist Party of Mexico, was a guest at the Communist Party of Australia’s National Congress in mid-June.

The Mexican Communist Party is currently emerging from a period of illegality imposed after the mass struggles of 1968. Australians will recall the shootings and jailings by the Mexican authorities prior to the Olympic Games. Half the Central Committee of the Communist Party was jailed during the illegal period and the party had only 2,000 members (out of a population of 70 million). Since legality, membership has leapt to around 15,000.

The political problems involved in absorbing new cadres are compounded by the class composition of the party. The Communist Party established, or influenced the establishment of, all the major trade unions in Mexico. Their positions of influence were eroded by reformist/populist forces and the long period of decline, discussed in the interview, witnessed a severe erosion of the party’s working class base.

The new influx of members is predominantly from the middle class and the party still faces the task of rebuilding its industrial base.

Mexico faces a future of immense potential development based on oil reserves which make it the “Saudi Arabia of the Americas”. In addition, there are huge proven reserves of uranium. The movement against nuclear power has not yet impacted Mexican political life. The direction of future development, its control and the distribution of its benefits will depend upon the effectiveness of the Mexican left.
Firstly, the position of your party in relation to other forces. Could you say something about the size and composition of the marxist left in Mexico outside of the Communist Party?

Well, our party had a very deep crisis in the years from 1940 to 1960. This was due mainly to dogmatic positions, and difficulties in the application of marxist theory to the concrete conditions of Mexico. During those years and after them, other marxists developed in Mexico as groups or as individuals. So, today, when the Mexican left is able to regain the positions it had 20 years ago, we find ourselves in a situation where we have to recognise that there are other groups and parties which are significant, and which have gained a place in the fight for progress and for socialism in our country.

Because of that, we have a policy of unity with all these groups. We are now going into elections together with three other parties who come from the socialist movement and who had very big differences with the Communist Party about ten years ago. The struggle, the practical struggle of the last years, has brought these tendencies and the Communist Party much closer together.

Three years ago we began discussions with these parties about practical questions and began common actions together. For example, public demonstrations, participation in national strikes, signing and publication of declarations about current political problems of the country, unity in the anti-imperialist struggle. For more than two years, this was a very productive experience for all three organisations. And then we stated that the possibility of organic unity between our organisations was open. We began by two or three meetings with the three central committees of these organisations. At first, we began discussing the Mexican situation and came to an agreement to participate together in the election campaign under the symbol of the Mexican Communist Party. We also began talks about the conditions for creating one party which would absorb these three parties.

I cannot say that the differences have all been erased. We are not going into any unprincipled unity agreement. Unity in action is already a fact and we think now that we should look at the possibility of organic unity. For this we have created conditions:

First, by the declaration that our party does not consider that only communists are marxists in Mexico. There are many marxists outside the Communist Party.

Second, by saying that the Communist Party is ready to discuss many of its political positions and even its internal organisation with other marxists who are willing to take part in the formation of one big workers’ party in Mexico.

And third, we have shown that we have no desire to be thought of as the hegemonic force or as more important than the other parties. Only the real strength and development of the struggle will decide the exact place which each one of us will take in the forming of a big united workers’ party of Mexico.

We have already said that we have no prejudices, that we are ready to talk with people with whom we have important differences, ideological differences, like trotskyites and even maoists, if they take a different position from the very sectarian one they take on Mexican politics.

You described the three parties with whom you are seeking organic unity as “socialist”. Could you say more about the political position they adopt and also what size they are compared to the Mexican Communist Party?

The most important of them is the Popular Party of Mexico. This is a group which came out of the Socialist Party, formed in the 'fifties. It called itself marxist-leninist, but in practice had a very reformist and opportunist line expressed in the fact that, in all the clashes between the popular movements and the Mexican state, they always took the side of the Mexican state.

At the time, the Mexican Communist Party chose to be always with the masses, even when we felt that the movement was not going to succeed, or was not completely directed by the Communist Party. The result was that the Socialist Party which had some important and popular backing at the beginning of the 'fifties, slowly lost its mass support and was transformed into a
bureaucratic group backed by the ruling party of Mexico which is basically a bourgeois party. The group that split from the Socialist Party came to the conclusion that its place was with the struggle of the masses and, in practice, came to have positions very close to those of the Communist Party. It is a much smaller group than the Communist Party, but is an important group especially in two regions in the country where it is the main leftist force. It has peasant backing and, in some places, it has considerable support in the teachers' union.

The second one is a group which was thrown out of the party in the 'fifties because it was considered to be an opportunist group. But they kept on fighting and changed their line, coming nearer and nearer the party.

The third group is a small group which came from the Socialist Party but much more recently.

I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that in this coalition of four parties the main force is the Communist Party. But the others are important political movements. I suppose that one of the few things we in Australia know about Mexico is that it was the place where Leon Trotsky was exiled and murdered. What sort of level and presence has trotskyism had in Mexico?

The trotskyites were divided into many groups but not long ago — about three years ago — they formed a new party in which four of these groups were united. This party began by making its presence felt in the universities but has now developed and built up some strength in the working class and popular movements, too. We went, together with this trotskyist party, into the election campaign five years ago where we put up a candidate for the presidency, a Mexican communist who is a workers' leader, a man who has worked with railway workers for 20 years and who had been in prison for many years.

The trotskyists supported his campaign. We agreed on a minimum common platform and I think this was a very good experience for them and for us too. Many people both inside and outside Mexico attacked us for co-
operating with the trotskyists, but we think unity in action has to be achieved on the basis of a common platform and without promoting ideological differences. If we are ready to work together with non-marxists, why shouldn’t we be ready to work with trotskyists? They form a tendency in the workers’ movement, the world workers’ movement, with which we do not agree but with which it is possible to work. Perhaps I’ll tell you something, I don’t know whether you can publish it, but you will see after I tell you. The problem of Trotsky played a very important role in the crisis of our party.

In 1939 they tried to make the national leadership of the Communist Party of Mexico co-operate in the assassination of Trotsky. Because these leaders were not prepared to participate in that and because they said that they did not agree with assassination as a way of solving political problems, they were expelled from the party and accused of being trotskyists — an accusation which was not true because they were in the leadership of a big anti-Trotsky campaign going on in Mexico. This contributed very much to the long crisis into which our party fell for 20 years.

So at present the forces with which you are entering the election campaign are three parties. In addition to those there are the Trotskyist parties .... ?

No. We could not come to an agreement with the trotskyist parties about the election campaign. They have a completely different view from ours of the character of this election campaign. We think our objective should be the unity of the left, while they think the objective should be a tactic of class against class. That is quite a big difference. So when we discussed a common platform we couldn’t reach agreement. But that’s the only area where we’re not co-operating.

In other aspects, then, there is a level of unity?

Yes. We’re working together with them in the universities and in some places where popular movements exist.

The other question to which comrades at the Congress who had been speaking with you drew my attention — and I must say they were delighted about it — was the question of the women’s movement and feminist consciousness in Mexico. I wonder if you could say something about the history of your party’s approach to this question. Certainly in our party there was a fairly short and — politically — violent change in that feminism hit the party like a tidal wave. In a few short years it has taken it by storm. Did the movement impact your own party in this way?

No. I think the Mexican feminist movement is not so strong. From what I have heard, you have a much more developed feminist movement here in Australia. However, I wouldn’t say that, in Mexico, things are not rapidly changing in this sense too. Our party has been traditionally active in this area. We had a democratic women’s organisation which our party backed and which survived many difficult periods of repression.

But the new feminist movement naturally has many new aspects. The fight against what you call sexism, the right to abortion, the right to different forms of sexuality — these are the new components of the feminist world movement of today. This began appearing in Mexico and, as a result, three women’s organisations came into being. Originally, there was some resistance from traditional women’s organisations to coming into contact with these new tendencies and the same was true from the other side. They didn’t want to have anything to do with the traditional women’s movement. But in the last five years there have been many approaches, each learning from the other. And now a new unity, a federation has begun. It will probably become one big united women’s movement. It is gaining momentum and every day becomes more important in Mexican reality. I must say that during the years of persecution there were few women in our party, but in recent years many have joined. Perhaps more than a third of our membership is now women.
To what extent did differences between the old and the new movements reflect a class question. Did the new feminism essentially come out of the universities and out of the middle class? If so, to what extent has it percolated through to the working class areas?

It began as a movement among the middle class, among intellectuals and students. It had very many difficulties making contact with the working sectors of society. But I think this period is now over. The existence of the traditional women's movement has very much helped this new group to acquire a political maturity that would have taken it a lot of time to find by itself. I think the characteristics of the new democratic women's movement in Mexico will be exactly that. It will unite people who are working on problems of concern to urban intellectuals and problems which are central to the interests of the working people.

You mentioned earlier that there are, I think, two Catholic priests on the list of people you are supporting in the election, and you've just mentioned the question of abortion. Immediately one can see the potential for conflict there. Does that arise frequently? I'm thinking of this not just in terms of that question but in terms of all sorts of potential conflicts which could arise. How do you see these conflicts coming through and what forms of resolution do you find for them in practice?

The Mexican Catholic Church is changing very fast. Twenty years ago it was mainly a reactionary political force. It was very difficult to find any progressive expression inside it, but this is completely changed today. A lot of priests and important sections of the church have adopted very progressive positions on many of the main problems of Mexico and they agree with the Communist Party on these political issues. At the same time, our party has declared very clearly that
we consider that Mexican Catholics are one of the main forces for the Mexican revolution, for the Mexican socialist movement.

Socialism will come in Mexico and will be won by people who are Catholic, who stay Catholic and who will be Catholic after the revolution. Because of that, the problem of socialism in Mexico cannot be stated or cannot be practically worked for without solving the problem of the participation in the movement for socialism of Catholics who are convinced of their religious thought and who want to participate in the fight for socialism through their Catholic beliefs.

Therefore, we strive to keep very good relations with these left forces of the Mexican church. More than that, we are, consequently, fighters for the restitution of political rights to Mexican priests and churchpeople.

Under the Mexican constitution, Mexican priests cannot take part in political life. They cannot be elected, they cannot vote, they cannot demonstrate in religious dress and we think that any kind of curtailment of democratic rights of citizens, be they churchpeople, soldiers, or any other sectors of the Mexican population, is a limitation of democratic rights. This does not mean we forget that the main strength of the Catholic church is conservative today. And it does not mean that we agree with the Catholics about everything. We maintain discussion on many things and one of those is abortion.

The fact that we disagree with the left groups of the Catholic church on abortion doesn’t mean we cannot agree on the question of wages, or the fight against inflation, or freedom of expression, or even socialism, even the possibility of discussing socialism with them. We work not only with the Catholics. There are many liberals who have a very long anti-religious tradition and we work with them too. We do not accept this old liberal anti-religious attitude that attacks the right of people to hold religious beliefs. But we respect the long tradition that exists in Mexico of fighting for a civil society free from the domination of the church. This is a big achievement of the Mexican revolutionary struggles of the nineteenth century.

Moving to international questions. I suppose I’m very happy to raise these having just come from a Congress where we had so many messages of solidarity, in marked contrast to a few years ago when we were out in the cold. Could you say something about the position of your party in the international arena and where it’s come from historically?

Well, from the experience of our own development, we have come to the conclusion that each communist party must be responsible for the development of the revolutionary movement in their own country. In these times it is impossible to speak about any kind of centre or any kind of co-ordination between communist parties which goes beyond the solidarity we have to extend to one another in the common fight against imperialism and for a socialist future for humanity. This means that our party is ready to maintain relations with all communist parties without asking them to agree on every subject for discussion inside the communist movement today.

We think that many people have become socialists because socialism or the movement for socialism is growing very fast. It would be completely false to think that this tremendous movement can be directed, or can be oriented, from any one centre in the world.

Because of that, our party has made many efforts to establish relations — friendly, comradely relations — with all parties which are part of the communist movement. In this sense, we think that different attitudes towards one problem or another cannot be an obstacle to building this proletarian solidarity which all parties need.

We appreciate very much the efforts of the Communist Party of Australia to develop an independent position, to defend it against all possible pressures from without and we are happy that you are making efforts to improve relations with all other communist parties.
THE ESCAMBRAY THEATRE ...  
A NEW WAY FORWARD FOR POLITICAL THEATRE IN AUSTRALIA

In 1978 Richard Fletcher was New Theatre’s delegate to the 11th World Youth Festival in Cuba. This article is based on discussions held with the Escambray Theatre at that time, and on articles about the group translated by Dan O’Neill.

In 1968, almost ten years after the overthrow of the bloody Batista regime, a group of actors, musicians and directors left Havana for the mountains.

The group, which included some of Cuba’s leading performers, set out to find a new style of theatre. For months, theatre workers in Havana had discussed the limited nature of their contribution to Cuba’s development. While theatre had gained stability and a political orientation with the triumph of the revolution, it had remained traditional in form and was still focused on the cities.

But it was in the countryside that Cuba’s immediate economic survival was being decided. The sugar industry and the diversification of agriculture were crucial to its survival. And it was in these zones that the most radical social transformations were taking place. The obvious place to practise their craft, then, was in the countryside.

They thought they would have the best chance of success in an area rich in contradictions, in the process of an important economic transformation, and relatively complex historically. They chose Escambray province: a mountainous underdeveloped region in the centre of Cuba. Although it had a few industrial centres, the majority of its 200,000 population were rural peasants.

It was here that the counter-revolutionaries had tried to establish a base after the revolution. While a battle raged between the revolutionary forces and the CIA-backed “bandits”, the minifundios (small landowners) waited on the sidelines. Eventually, a majority decided for the revolution and the bandits were finished. But this was only in 1966, just two years before the Escambray group started.

The first step was research. For five weeks, in three teams of four, they covered the province interviewing groups and individuals, recording local stories, songs and patterns of speech. Every week the groups met to share experiences and plan their work. They had previously put their case to the National Cultural Council and then the regional party organisation. As a result, each of the groups was accompanied
by a "guide" and a regional leader was present at each weekly meeting.

Finally, in May 1969 the group left Havana to set up permanently in Escambray. They took with them: one amplifier, four Chinese trumpets, a damaged tape recorder, a portable blackboard, some platforms and reflectors, tools, a Zil truck, and a burnt-out generator. When they eventually arrived in Escambray (the truck wasn't exactly new) they set up in the National School for primary school teachers.

During their research they had discovered both this school and its potential. When teachers became involved in the communities where they were placed, the group observed, they commanded enormous respect and were powerful opinion leaders. The school (the only one in the province) had 5,000 teachers in training and only a single music teacher for cultural activities.

The chance to influence so many future teachers (and through them so many communities) was too good to miss. As well, the administration of the school was sympathetic, so they renovated a small theatre building and made this their first base in Escambray. At the end of the school year, 1,000 students participated in performances seen by 7,000 people. As a result, a program was initiated to train cultural workers to organise performances and give classes in work centres and communities.

This continued and developed after the group had moved on and is known today as The Cultural Front. It involves many hundreds of instructors covering all areas of Cuba.

At the same time, four works were prepared to tour the province. During the preparation which involved presenting the shows to the students, teachers and workers of the school, four guiding principles were agreed upon. They were:

* The group should live in the zone; the work pattern would be 48 days' continuous work and ten days' rest.

* Support for the group would increasingly be borne by the zone (instead of the central organisation) and the group should be considered the region's own group.

* All promotion should be done by the group ensuring control over the direction of the work and conditions.

* The group should collaborate closely with rank and file authorities.

The first works to tour the region were: Some Men and Others, a play in traditional form about the fight against the bandits; three medieval French farces adapted to accentuate their commentary on the position of women in marriage and society; Escambray Mambi, written by one of the group which attempted to confront the audience with and inform them about the participation of the people of the zone in the wars of the last century; a didactic talk on the history of the theatre illustrated with six pantomimes.

On their first trip they performed to 38,000 spectators, usually 200 to 300 at a time. They would stay in each village approximately ten days, spacing out their shows to allow time for discussion with villagers about the shows, and for further research. Just their presence in the village was enough publicity and a performance site, often a cattle grazing area or a street corner, would be arranged.

On the first night they would perform Some Men and Others, the most traditional work, followed by the talk on theatre with the pantomimes. A few days later they would perform the farces, and finally Escambray Mambi. Discussion of the issues raised in the plays was central to their concept of theatre assisting in the transformation of society. The group aimed to be a weapon in "the battle of ideas".

One idea the group addressed through its works was that of the equality of women.

"Changes in the economic structure do not mechanically imply changes in consciousness to the same depth. Prejudices, old moral conceptions, hereditary forms of thought, ghosts from capitalist and other societies still fly around in the stage of construction of socialism. Hence the problems which are still confronted in Cuba: the moral evaluation of women and the practical realisation of the equality of men and women."

From notes presented by the Grupo Teatro Escambray to the Congress of Socialist Theatre, Moscow 1975.

The three farces raised the issue of women's place in society. The humorous
treatment, and the fact that the couples in the play were bourgeois, allowed the audience to discuss the points made about women without feeling they were being lectured.

Although this format: performance then discussion, seemed effective in that it did raise issues, and it was popular, the group continued to strive for more powerful and effective forms of communication. On their second tour they found two very different avenues for more effective communication.

It wasn’t until they had been in Escambray for some time that they recognised the strong approval given to those “who speak prettily”. They had brought from Havana, they realised, an attitude common in western theatre at the time: that words had become irrelevant. But they discovered not only a tradition of storytellers, especially in the lodging houses where men would spend a long time away from home, but a popular song form called Decimas. In these ten-line stanzas, accompanied by guitar, everything from romantic yearnings to political arguments (with two guitarists singing alternate stanzas) could be conveyed.

To participate in this tradition they produced a performance of stories. Without costuming or props, the story is told by a narrator as actors take the parts of the characters. One example: A campesino dies of hunger. When the relatives come to the house to bury him they notice that his eyes aren’t closed. One by one, they try different methods to get him to close his eyes. Finally, one places a bowl of potato soup on the dead man’s chest. In an effort to see what smells so delicious, he closes his eyes.

Each story ends with a Decima on the same topic. Often, by the end of the night, the performers are the audience for local storytellers. In this way their store of tales is constantly enriched.

The second avenue came through the production of La Vitrina, a play about the implementation of a development plan for the region. The plan involved the construction of schools, highways and villages of apartment blocks. To promote a dairy industry, land was to be reorganised into a system of state-owned and private ranches.

As the change-over was to be voluntary, the group was asked to estimate “the level of acceptance of the plan and the reasons for this”. They interviewed members of the national association of agricultural producers (minifundios), members of cooperatives, the commission of renting (who would decide rent rates), and 127 peasants whose land had been included in the plan.

In La Vitrina they attempted to reflect back to the peasants the contradictory attitudes and beliefs which they had gleaned through their interviews. As well, instead of leaving any discussion this might provoke until the end of the play, they included a parenthesis in the script where characters could address the audience directly and solicit opinions and arguments.

The effect of this audience participation revealed a new level of dialogue: not only did the audience become animated and very excited but they became committed to the outcome of the play as a collective solution to a problem. At first, the “outcome”, or at least the later development of the play, didn’t depend on what happened in the parenthesis at all. After interacting with the audience, the play took its predetermined, rehearsed form. But to take advantage of this new level, plays were developed to facilitate a “collective phenomenon of communication”.

“It became possible to require that the spectator discuss and analyse the problems posed immediately, and take a position. Not individually, but collectively. This collective social deed implies an ideological growth in the person.”

2. El Teatro, un arma eficaz al servicio de la Revolucion by Grupo Teatro Escambray

The development of this method is evident in the way the group approached the problem of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The “Witnesses” enjoyed great influence under the Batista regime. With staunch supporters like Francisco Batista, the governor of Havana province (and the dictator’s brother) the Witnesses gained converts throughout Cuba and especially in underdeveloped rural zones like Escambray.

After the revolution, they maintained an influence in these areas. They opposed military service at a time when assassinations and sabotage occurred regularly, and a direct armed invasion was
attempted (the Bay of Pigs). They also opposed development plans proposed by local authorities and all practices honoring “heroes of the Revolution”. (The emulation of revolutionary heroes is an important part of political education in Cuba.)

The first play to attempt to counter the Witnesses was an adaptation of The Guns of Mother Carrer by Bertold Brecht. This is the story of the supposed neutrality of a Catholic woman during the Spanish civil war. In the adaptation, the play is set in a future Cuba invaded by a foreign army, making the parallels unmistakable.

Two years later a different approach was tried. In Paradise Regained a session of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is reconstructed (those joining the Witnesses were required to act out their lives before the congregation revealing the steps that had brought them to take the faith). In this ‘theatre within a theatre’ the manipulation of real life crises to gain converts to the Witnesses is ridiculed. At different times the audience is addressed directly, and responds, so that by the conclusion of the play they are part of the dismantling of the myths of the Witnesses.

A third and more developed method is evident in The Judgment by Gilda Hernandez (a member of the group). It begins by asking the audience to select, from among themselves, six trustworthy people to act as a jury. With the audience, this jury is asked to sit in judgment in the case against the Witnesses. The ‘evidence’ is acted out before the audience in the form of scenes, as in a traditional play, but at any point the jury or the audience can interrupt to ask questions or pursue a line of investigation. In the end the jury, in discussion with the audience, is asked to pass judgment on the Witnesses.

The result of giving the public the elements and facts necessary to ‘analyse and reflect’ on the problem collectively was to ‘raise to a rational plane, the intuitive impulse of class hatred and to achieve a wider comprehension of the need for measures against the Jehovah’s Witnesses’.

We start with the criterion, say the group,

that the great problems of our revolutionary development require collective discussions and collective solutions. In showing them an image of the reality of Escambray and of the people of Escambray we give to those people their right of correcting or rejecting that image.

They know that
the works will go on being modified or remade according to their assessments.

The risk of a paternalistic approach to a public that is artistically uninformed — an approach that nearly always leads to populism — is avoided by the profound respect we have that our public merits from us; and by the awareness that we have that it is this public that is the principal protagonist of the revolution.

3. Participacion, comunicacion y estructura dramatica en el Teatro del Escambray by Gilda Hernandez.

The two latter appeared in El Teatro Latino Americano de Cronic Colective, compiled by Francisco Garzon Cespedes, Casa de las Americas.

Today, the Escambray group is one of the most respected theatres in Cuba and Latin America. It has influenced not only the formation of new groups, such as the youth theatre on the Isle of Youth, but the practice of other established, more traditional theatres.

All forms of theatre in Cuba are assumed to be fulfilling a need of some section of the population, so street theatre and circus as well as traditional theatre and opera are supported. (The Escambray Group receives approximately $200,000 a year. Actors’ salaries vary with experience but begin well below the national average salary.) An additional assumption is that workers in these areas of theatre are constantly striving to improve their work, both technically and politically. In the political sphere (serving the Revolution) the Escambray group has pioneered a model of relevance that has encouraged other groups to move their performances out into the streets and to make them more responsive to public criticism.

What the work of the Escambray group indicates is, I believe, a possible way forward for theatre in Australia: the potential of a political theatre group based either on an industry or in a specific region.
We already have regional theatre groups, of course. But they are all very conservative both in style (they have a theatre with a stage, props, lighting, etc.) and in the material that they present. They invariably cater for a small percentage of the population in the area with a taste for ‘the arts’. As yet, we have no industry-based theatres at all.

We also have established ‘political’ theatre groups in many states: The Pram Factory; Desperate Measures; New Theatre; The Popular Theatre Troupe, as well as several street theatre groups. (Feminist and black theatre I will come to presently.)

That these groups do important work is clear. However, they all differ from the Escambray group in an important respect — they do not present material related directly to a particular audience.

Whether they are presenting classic revolutionary plays by Brecht or Gorky, or plays written about contemporary issues like uranium or East Timor, they are still presenting general works — for virtually any audience. They are not producing works with reflect a particular group, complete with slang and local customs. So they cannot make a small audience of people who live in a particular area, or work in a particular industry, recognise themselves on the stage.

And this element of recognition is the driving force behind the search for solutions to the problems which make political
productions effective. It makes the audience want to 'search for solutions in order to correct this image'.

However, we can see this process at work in other areas. Both the feminist and the black theatres have a particular knowledge of their audiences (when they are women and black respectively). They can provoke that "Oh yes, I recognise that from my own experience" reaction — a mixture of excitement and embarrassment — in an audience when they see some unrecognised aspect of themselves presented publicly.

When workers have impromptu shows mimicking one of themselves, the same dynamic is at work. But professional or amateur actors' theatre groups don't have this sort of knowledge of the people they are trying to reach. This is why so many of their attempts at political theatre look like stereotypes. The narrowest definition they can give to a character is 'worker' or 'boss'. No wonder they seem wooden and simplistic.

The method used by the Escambray group of researching, then writing and performing and researching again, suggests a way to give left wing theatres this power to provoke the 'search for solutions'. (Whether they should or would develop the participation methods of the Escambray group is a separate question.)

In selecting a target group to research, a major consideration would be its size. The group must be small enough to manage yet large enough to provide work and support for a theatre troupe. And they must have a lot in common. Industries such as power, railways, sugar, mining and steel are possibilities. The difficulties of funding, however, will probably necessitate theatres based on these industries but within a particular area, so that the theatre can serve a community rather than just an industry. Areas such as the Latrobe Valley, Wollongong, the sugar belt from Bundaberg to Cairns, and Port Pirie are possibilities.

A host of other factors like the attitude of the unions involved, the concentration of workers in an industry, the language problem and the turnover of workers would have to be considered.

And groups in Australia could not, of course, count on the backing of the regional authorities nor could they rely on workers recognising that "like them we are part of the revolution". There are, however, other similarities between Escambray and, say, the mining area of the NSW south coast.

Although Australia is not in a post-revolutionary phase, we are in a stage of dislocation and transition (the onslaughts of the Fraser government, the restructuring of capital, etc). In all the industries mentioned, technological change is making the workers more redundant and more alienated. And it is precisely at the personal level of feeling redundant and alienated that the theatre can apply itself. Rather than dealing with epic themes about the meaning of life as traditional theatre does, or with the large-scale evils of unemployment or multinationals as many political theatres do, theatre can reflect the personal anxiety confronting workers in a particular situation.

The coal miner, for example, faces progressive deskilling as machinery such as continuous miners are introduced. At the level of these workers' hopes and fears, trying to survive in a changing industry, a theatre in Australian coalfields could be just as relevant as the Escambray group in their province. The same would be true for sugar mills, railworkers and telephone exchanges.

One group has already started in Wollongong. Some theatre workers from Sydney's New Theatre are interviewing members of the mining community on the south coast preparatory to launching a professional theatre company there next year. It will perform works based on the history and present difficulties of the coal mining area.

The goal, of course, is to have workers within areas and industries producing their own theatre, but waiting for this won’t help it happen. Industry-based theatre groups could give a timely push to political theatre in this country, just as it did in Cuba.

And the aims of groups here might well be identical with those of the Escambray group.

We don’t aspire to immortality with our works. We hope that they will be useful to those individuals in particular situations and that they may help them to make their conduct ever more human, more generous and more revolutionary.
Arguably the most interesting and, probably, most controversial part of this important book is the chapter on reform and revolution. Of course, Miliband is not the first to tackle this aspect of marxism. A great number of the ideas, references and issues he writes about have been dealt with over a long period of time by others — not least by Marx and Engels themselves. But few, if any, have set out the situation so well in the space of a few thousand words. Miliband has systematised and analysed many of the key problems and, while he hasn’t provided final solutions, he has asked many of the right questions.

What may be an acute difficulty for the reader in Miliband’s treatment of the making of socialist revolution lies in his use of the word ‘reformist’. With the meaning and usage of ‘reformist’, as throughout the book, the author seeks to go back to fundamentals. Despite the connotations of ‘reformist’, he maintains the validity of the non-pejorative use of the word. The reader’s difficulties are increased by Miliband’s use of social reform, therefore ‘social reformist’, where generally ‘reformist’ has been used pejoratively to describe a particular political approach. Thus, Miliband does not refer to Social Democratic and Labor parties as ‘reformist’ but as parties of social reform.

To Miliband, social reform is an intrinsic part of the politics of capitalism — he is concerned in this book primarily with bourgeois democracy — including capitalist political forces which have regarded reform as a barrier to socialism, and also including movements and associations of workers whose aims did not go beyond the achievement of specific and limited reforms, for instance, the early stages of British and Australian trade unionism. The author believes that this trend is uppermost in the large working-class parties in several capitalist countries. (The Australian Labor Party would be an example.) Even where there is a formal commitment to wholesale social transformation, these parties are in fact parties of social reform. The improvements that a necessarily imperfect society requires are not considered part of a coherent and comprehensive strategy of socialist change.

In contradistinction to what he describes as social reform, Miliband asserts that ‘reformism’ is one of the two main strategies of socialist revolution dealt with by marxism. The other is ‘insurrectionism’, which he equates particularly with later leninism. Miliband is not entirely free from ambivalence about the two strands. He fairly plainly favors — a bit tentatively — the ‘reformist’ path for marxists in bourgeois democratic regimes because although ‘bourgeois democracy is crippled by its class limitations’ the civic freedoms of bourgeois democracy, which are under constant threat of further and drastic impairment are ‘the product of centuries of unremitting popular struggles’. (Miliband, p. 189.) Regimes which lead to the suppression of all opposition and the stifling of all civic freedoms must be taken to represent a disastrous regression, whatever the economic and social achievements of which they may be capable. Yet Miliband acknowledges that there are many regimes where radical social change ultimately will depend on the force of arms. But there is an underlying, perhaps unwarranted, assumption that this path will automatically lead to a very serious regression if it is applied in countries of ‘advanced’ capitalism.

Miliband sets out with great skill the legitimacy of ‘reformist’ marxism, its dangers and its promise. What he means by ‘reformism’ is what Marx meant in the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League and The Class Struggles in France when he wrote of ‘making the revolution permanent’ (not what Trotsky meant), striving for the advancement of the aims of the proletariat within the framework of capitalism ‘until all more or less possessing
classes have been forced out of their position of dominance' (quoted Miliband, pp. 158-9). Marx and Engels made it clear from 1848 to 1895 that this striving included constant pressure for reforms of every sort. Indeed, Lenin in one of his too-neglected texts, Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, at the height of the 1905 revolution, sticking closely to the program of Russian Social Democracy, presented the Bolshevik case in essentially the same terms.

Such a strategy is, of course, not to be equated with 'gradualism' as propounded by Sidney Webb and the original Fabians, according to which the achievement of a socialist society is conceived as a slow but sure advance by way of a long sequence of reforms, at the end of which (or for that matter in 'gradualism' as propounded by Sidney Webb)颜值下降 presented the Bolshevik case in essentially the same terms.

The nub of the difference between marxist 'reformism' and its alter ego, 'insurrectionism', is that a 'reformist' strategy is clearly and emphatically first directed to a politics of conflict within the limits of constitutionalism as defined by the existing political structures. This emphasis on constitutionalism, electoralism, and democratic representation is certainly crucial in the definition of 'reformism', but marxist 'reformism' is directed to the masses. It is a strategy of social struggle and more specifically class struggle on many different fronts, at many different levels: in this sense it is quite definitely a politics of conflict.

Miliband doesn't overlook the dangers of marxist 'reformism' as a revolutionary strategy. There is the danger of 'reciprocal constitutionalism' — what others have taken to be integration into the capitalist system. Although legality and constitutionalism, at least in non-revolutionary circumstances, do not mean abandoning revolutionary aims, parties with serious electoral ambitions are tempted to widen their support to appeal to politically less radical sections of the people and so emphasise the relative moderation of their immediate demands. To put it another way, their immediate program may fall short in all respects of real transitional demands. Another danger is too great a preoccupation with the risks of what Engels called 'vanguard skirmishes' in case the 'shock force' of the party was put at risk.

Miliband applies these considerations to pre-WW I German democracy and the post-WW II communist parties of Western Europe and 'advanced' capitalist countries in general. In the latter case, he considers the scenario of a coalition of leftwing parties, in which the communist party has an important or preponderant place, winning an election with a common anti-capitalist program. What happens then? The danger would be that marxist 'reformist' leaders would resile from implementing the program. There would be some change of state personnel, institutional, administrative and social reforms, even some measures of state ownership of industry — but that is all. No more could be expected from leaders who may have been well integrated in the bourgeois political system. They would act as agents of stabilisation and would be willing to suppress the working class militancy which would be fostered by the situation.

Before looking at how Miliband deals with these possibilities, it is important to consider his appraisal of what he regards as the alternative marxist strategy. While he recognises Marx and Engels' belief in class conflict and the repressive role of the state, he seems to attach too much significance to the impact of World War I on Lenin's thinking. In fact, while Miliband's separation of the two strands of marxist strategy is a justified analytical distinction, he tends to not allow for the possibility of overlap and interaction. In other words, he shows a lack of sufficient discrimination in his thought on this point. He is
right in criticising the Third International’s over-sanguine theses of 1919-20, and Lenin must bear considerable responsibility for the simplistic character of the Twenty-one Conditions and other Comintern theses of the period. But Lenin was not as inflexible as Miliband implies, although the sweeping generality of much early Comintern doctrine demonstrated a naive internationalism, failing to suggest strongly enough that the variables of different national situations could easily outweigh a belief in the universality of bolshevism.

Miliband, however, goes too far in his strictures on the Comintern (as he implicitly acknowledges elsewhere). He rather sweepingly asserts ‘...Leninism as a coherent strategy of insurrectionary politics was never seriously pursued by the Third International... it was never seriously pursued by its constituent communist parties’ (Miliband, p. 169). Certainly, some Comintern theses were inapplicable to many situations, but ‘insurrectionary’ politics were rightly or wrongly pursued in places as different as Canton and Hamburg, and as late as 1928 the Comintern quite deliberately sought to perfect the theory and practice of armed insurrection. And this option was kept alive and proved successful in China and Yugoslavia, and played a part in communist politics elsewhere.

In spite of his generally favoring a ‘reformist’ strategy for the countries of ‘advanced’ capitalism, Miliband finally chooses to declare both the ‘reformist’ and ‘insurrectionist’ models as not representing realistic perspectives. Leaving aside his objections to the ‘insurrectionist’ option, in what areas does he find ‘reformism’ at fault? Although his detailed argument becomes slightly contradictory, the crux of his analysis involves what might be called a moderate or weak ‘reformism’ and a radical or strong ‘reformism’. The moderate ‘reformism’ is outlined above, with its dangers of integration. Miliband’s outline of the response of the radical or strong ‘reformism’ seems politically pretty sophisticated (Miliband, pp. 183-8).

His final point is made too briefly, which may reflect a failure to examine the practice of revolutionary movements in as much depth as he has assiduously examined the classical texts. However, his point is quite tantalising in its implications. He maintains that what is required is ‘... a flexible and complex network of organs of popular participation operating throughout civil society and intended not to replace the state but to complement it. This is Miliband’s ‘reformist’ version of ‘dual power’. The organs of popular participation do not challenge the ‘reformist’ marxist government but act as a defensive-offensive and generally supportive element in what is a semi-revolutionary and exceedingly fraught state of affairs. Such a situation, Miliband argues, would be consistent with the dictum of The

Civil War in France that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose’. For what would follow, if counter-revolution was to be foiled, would be ‘...a vast extension of democratic participation in all areas of civic life — amounting to a very considerable transformation of the character of the state and of existing bourgeois democratic forms’ (Miliband, p. 188).

Marxism and Politics covers much more than the chapter on reform and revolution. It systematises splendidly several of the central issues of marxist political theory: class conflict; culture, consciousness and ideology; the state; class and party. As Miliband himself points out, much of the theoretical exploration of politics in classical marxism is unsystematic and fragmentary, and there are very definite limits to efforts to construct or reconstruct. Much of the available writing is perfunctory or simply silent on major issues of politics and political theory. Then there is the additional problem brought at any rate by stalinist impoverishment of creative theorisation. The accent was on authoritative interpretations and non-arguable propositions. So there is a vast amount of ground to make up.

Miliband says that in marxist politics, it is essential that Marx and Engels should have textual priority. It is only then that one can usefully take up Lenin, Luxemburg, Gramsci and others to construct a marxist politics. Although a beginning has been made since the 1950s, mainly in the countries of ‘advanced’ capitalism, nothing like enough has been done to constitute a body of serious work on all the major topics of political thought and practice. Miliband, the co-editor of the annual Socialist Register, now the Professor of Politics at Leeds University, where he wrote Parliamentary Socialism (1961) and The State in Capitalist Society (1969), did not set out to write a comprehensive work on marxism and politics. Nevertheless, he has succeeded in writing a short, lucid book for the interested reader, which makes the distinctive features of marxist politics, and many of its problems, immediately accessible.

Blue Collar is nothing less than a stunning American film, full of drama, intrigue, action, comic dialogue, even sex. Yet this movie, shown at the recent Sydney Film Festival, has failed to attract a commercial distributor in Australia. The reason: its unorthodox theme. It is not about the winning of the West, the conquest of space, or...
conventional cops and robbers; instead, it concerns, believe it or not, the everyday life of three Detroit auto workers and their struggles — in a violent and alienating society — against management brutality and manipulation, union bureaucracy, cynicism and corruption, and sheer poverty and hopelessness. To my mind, no contemporary film has attempted so much so tellingly.

Directed by Paul Schrader (who wrote the screenplays for Taxi Driver and Obsession), Blue Collar presents a complex reality. Zeke, Jerry and Smokey work "on the line" in a Detroit auto works. Their working lives are dominated by the assembly line which drains them, physically and emotionally, with its incredible noise, and the constant hectoring of the foreman — by turns bullying and cajoling, using abuse and flattery in an exercise obviously grounded more in self-importance and management control than in industrial efficiency. Their union, presided over by an increasingly compromised old militant who earlier in his career had fought the good fight against racism, is under government scrutiny and investigation regarding union democracy, possible misappropriation of funds, etc. Although the local union representative is widely regarded by the rank and file as gutless and inefficient, the men are firmly behind their union, refusing to wash dirty linen in public when the government snooper tries to interview them.

Their private lives — for the two married men, at least — are dogged by debts and family financial responsibilities (braces, back taxes, etc.) they increasingly can't meet. The treadmill of bills and borrowing, the absurdity of forcing yourself to watch television programs you regard as crap simply because it took you three years to pay for the color TV set, and the short-lived exhilaration of Smokey's bachelor coke-and-sex parties, are so relentlessly demoralising, disorganising and downright depressing that the trio's desperate decision to rob their union office is amazing. The wonder is not that Smokey is dead and nothing can bring him back; the union-arranged foreman's job is perhaps his (Zeke's) only chance to get out of the ghetto; if Jerry would only play ball and forget the stupidity of wanting justice for Smokey, he can get a pay-off too, probably become the union rep. Jerry stands silent, dumbfounded, in the shattered remnants of their comradeship. Pressured by the union thugs, afraid for his family's safety, abandoned by Zeke, Jerry makes a deal with the FBI man, getting "justice" for Smokey and protection for himself, by dobbing in the union. The film ends on a freeze-frame of Jerry and Zeke screaming racial epithets at each other in the assembly-line din.

Some reviewers have criticised this film as anti-union. It certainly exposes the big business aspects of big unions, something which all of us both recognise and deplore. But far more important is the film's positive attitude toward the labor movement, and the possibilities it provides for caring, constructive lives. In no way is Blue Collar's clear, if caustic, presentation of American working class life cynical, sensational, or glib. The political "message" — that solidarity and comradeship are hard to come by, and that they don't necessarily reside in organisations privileged by history and rhetoric as repositories of "struggle" — is both important and timely. Most significant, for me, is the insight the film gives into the capacity of the most unlikely people, in the most unpromising circumstances, to struggle.

It is true that the alternatives presented in Blue Collar are bleak: union/management/government — all are repressive and co-opting; the strategies for coping forced on Zeke and Jerry are so horrific they can't even be called "compromises"; the film's ending is bathed in racism and hate. Yet notwithstanding the apparently impenetrable walls boxing in the characters, the film's whole underlying emphasis is on the fundamentally unobtainable, uncontrollable, unbeatable nature of the men's responses to their imprisonment, and on the rebellious energy which stalks the bureaucratic, industrialised world. Divide and rule, no matter how traditional a tactic, can be at best a short-term stratagem in these circumstances.

Whenever and wherever you can, be sure to see this film.

— Kathe Boehringer.
Civilisation at the Crossroads: social and human implications of the scientific and technological revolution, $4.50 (300 pp.), 1969.

Some copies of this very important pioneering work are still available. Published by ALR in 1969, the book is the work of a Czechoslovak interdisciplinary research team headed by Radovan Richta. It appeared late in 1967 in Czechoslovakia and undoubtedly resulted from the deep concern with the crisis in economy, politics and ideology which came to a head there at that time.

Its findings in turn provided the theoretical basis for the Action Program developed by the Czechoslovak Communist Party to meet that crisis.

These national aspects do not, however, detract from the universality of the problems dealt with. The book is a first-class piece of research and analysis about issues confronting all advanced industrial societies, as apt today as it was when published. Over 300 pages of text are supplemented by extensive tables and references. At today’s prices, it is selling cheaply.

Antonio Gramsci: The Man, His Ideas, by Alastair Davidson (100 pp.), 1969. $2.

This short book was one of the first works published in English about the life and work of the Italian marxist thinker and communist leader. It is still a valuable reference for those interested in Gramsci’s contribution to marxist thought and socialist politics.

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