AMERICAN POLITICS TODAY:

- Relegitimising Intervention
- Interview with Dorothy & Richard Healey

THE CHALLENGE OF RUDOLF BAHRO
IN THIS ISSUE

We publish two articles on different aspects of politics in the United States. One, an interview with Dorothy and Richard Healey, discusses the current state of working class and left politics in the US. The other, by American activist Michael Klare, analyses the attempts by the US establishment to recover from the Viet Nam debacle and to win public support for future global interventions.

Denis Freney, in a long review article, discusses the recent book by East German socialist dissident Rudolf Bahro The Alternative in Eastern Europe.

Max Bound discusses recent marxist writings and some practical activities which shed light on the difficult questions of how, and on what issues, radical change in our society might occur.

In Economic Notes, Gavan Butler examines the much-promoted alumina and aluminium industry in Australia. In Comment Eric Aarons looks at some of the political issues arising from plans for restructuring Australian capitalism in the 1980s.

A review by Roger Coates of a special Overland tribute to the late Ian Turner, and a discussion piece, complete the issue.
Deputy Prime Minister Anthony told a Metal Trades Industry Association meeting in October that “energy exports will make Australia one of the great countries of the world by repeating the boom conditions of the 1960s”. (The Australian, 23.10.79.) Such developments, he added, would also generate activity in provision of infrastructure, railways, handling equipment, machinery and machine shops.

Shortly after, Mr. Lynch, federal Minister for Industry and Commerce, announced “that $16.3 billion in investment projects was now at the committed or final feasibility stages”. (The Age, 27.10.79.)

These prospects were written up in glowing terms by Russell Schneider in the Weekend Australian of November 24-25, and in a long editorial in which a whole economic program, election policy and political philosophy is spelt out. Says the editorial:

At last some good news. Australia’s energy reserves give us the prospect of $16,000 million worth of investment, 100,000 or more new jobs, new towns, new industries.

The Australian Mining Industry Council recently pointed out that the industry faces many hazards. The obvious ones are world prices, inflation .... exchange rates and unexpected tax increases.

The increased cost of providing towns.... and the rest of the necessary infrastructure — railway systems, ports and airstrips — also adds to the risk of mining development .... It is no longer possible to leave this burden with the individual entrepreneur. Mining is a community gain for which the community must accept some responsibility.

Federal and State environmental controls can set back developments for many years, cost the companies involved a fortune, and deny countless jobs in the meantime.

Aboriginal land ownership (can also) thwart development.

And finally there is the question of stability .... $16,000 million .... cannot be committed without investors feeling confident that their funds will not be jeopardised by political uncertainty.

We can only hope politicians from both sides will realise that potential .... “

This is Murdoch speaking, but it could just as well be the Herald and Weekly Times. The takeover battle between them was not over policy, but power and spoils, as in the case of CSR.

Now look at the propositions themselves. In the first place, the investments are far from certain, more than half — nine billion dollars worth — of the total being still in the feasibility study stage.

The Financial Review’s ‘Chanticleer’ also pointed out that: “The euphoric stock market of recent months has run up against the inevitable — prices cannot continue to rise in the face of a likely world recession, rising interest rates and chronic oil problems.” (19.11.79)

The same writer also said concerning the spate of huge takeovers: “It is far cheaper these days to expand through a takeover than to buy new plant .... indicating that as much or more money is going into takeovers as into new investment.” (Financial Review, 10.10.79)

The soaring interest rates in Britain and the U.S. are also causing an outflow of capital seeking profits without doing anything at all, thereby reducing amounts available for investment.

Jobs?

But suppose all the investments do get under way, will it solve economic problems, especially unemployment?

The original announcement from the Department of Industry and Commerce
included a statement that 66,000 jobs would be created, half of them in the construction stage only, leaving only 33,000 jobs.

But let's take the higher, 100,000 figure — apparently arrived at on the basis of there being a "multiplier effect". 100,000 jobs sounds impressive, and it certainly can't be ignored. But how does it add up against the overall situation, there being few other announced plans to provide jobs.

In his Boyer lectures, which are not unconnected with the issues under discussion, as we shall see, Bob Hawke puts the number now wanting work at three-quarters of a million (those registered and the "hidden" unemployed).

On this basis, less than one-seventh of the unemployed would get work from these huge expenditures, while over a million school leavers would come onto the labor market during the decade. (Estimates vary, but the net increase in the workforce for the ten years, after deducting those who will retire, is likely to be between 600,000 and 700,000).

There will also be hundreds of thousands more jobs lost through technological change in both manufacturing and services. Computer expert, Linton-Simpkins, estimates that in only the first half of the 1980s, 500,000 jobs will disappear in the clerical area alone.

So, whatever its other merits or demerits, the kind of "energy future" envisaged for Australia by the hungry multinationals and their local hangers-on will certainly not solve the job problem.

The plans they have are for capital-intensive and energy-intensive enterprises, such as aluminium smelting. And this industry, like most other energy-intensive ones, is environmentally very detrimental.

And the jobless themselves?

"About half of the 141 people who committed suicide in South Australia last year were unemployed or out of the work force... suicides among unemployed people were five times as frequent as those among people with jobs."

— Sydney Morning Herald, 17.11.79.

"Women, both with and without dependent children, find not working a negative experience. Their lives are affected by their lack of income and their spending is reduced. Their social life also diminishes — boredom, depression and loneliness were the main emotions people expressed when asked how they felt about not working."

— Recent survey of the NSW Council of Social Service.

"Governments should resist proposals to compensate people who are adversely affected by technological change as such proposals are inherently inequitable in that they create a privileged class of social welfare recipients." (Treasury submission to Myer Inquiry into technological change.)

— Financial Review, 3.10.79.

"..... we (!) must not squander the proceeds from our mineral wealth in trying to build up some kind of cradle-to-the-grave welfare society, without any thought for the productive capacity of future generations." (Mr. John Utz, Chairman of Wormald International, at the Australian Institute of Management's 21st general conference.)

— Financial Review, 22.11.79.

"..... major disruptions to Australia's internal macro-economic policies have always come through the external balance."

— The Australian, 13.11.78.

The environment

To promote a non-solution to the jobs problem, environmental protection (and Aboriginal land rights) must be cut back, according to The Australian.

And how is the environment faring now?

"Rainfall with an acidity level of vinegar that can seriously affect aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, has been reported in widely separated areas of the earth in recent years." (Zoologist Dr. Harold Harvey criticised as nonsensical plans to overcome the acid rain's deadly effect on fish by breeding acid-resistant species.)

— Financial Review, 8.11.79.

At first sight it seems bizarre that anyone should even propose breeding acid-resistant fish as a "solution" to a mounting and deadly
pollution problem. But is it really so different from what is happening to us all the time?

We mustn’t stand in the way of technology, but fit into it, however job-destroying; however skill-eliminating; however much it helps to more firmly tighten the bosses’ control of the labor process; however dangerous to physical and mental health, the particular technology may be.

“If you think unhealthy working conditions are a feature of the past, not the present — think again .... last year .... one in every 19 workers in this state blamed their jobs for health problems which kept them off work for at least three days. The problems were the result of chemicals, dust, stress, noise, machinery and a multitude of other potential hazards we all face in our workplace.”

— Peter Manning, *Sun-Herald*, 18.11.79.

If you want opportunities for healthy, creative work, control of your fertility, your life on the job and where you live, forget it. Forget your needs, forget your humanity and force your body and your spirit into the mould demanded by modern capitalism.

And if you become half-demented in the process, or “criminal”, they have that covered too, with suitable treatments and confinements to force you into it.

They mightn’t yet be able to breed acid-resistant human beings, but they’re no doubt working on it as Aldous Huxley foresaw nearly fifty years ago in his famous book *Brave New World*.

It is supposed to be “realistic” to go along with what you can’t immediately change, and this has been the main point hammered by Bob Hawke in advocating uranium mining. (He really means “get with the strong”.)

But how realistic is it to go voluntarily along the nuclear road?

Professor Hannes Alfven, Swedish physicist who helped develop nuclear power, is now “adamant that the ... nuclear power industry is the road to death and must be dismantled.”

He says: “Even the Pacific Ocean is too small to be acceptable as a waste disposal area.” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17.11.79.)

However, the professor was not just negative, but added: “Your country is wonderfully placed to use solar energy.” And pointing to the sun, added: “That nuclear reactor is 150 million kilometres away and we are shielded from its harmful radioactive waves. That is the nuclear reactor we must learn to use to the full.”

**Energy policy**

Australia’s energy future is crucial for our economic future, our employment future. This is also true of the world.

The road proposed by the Fraser government, *The Australian*, and virtually the whole capitalist class is a wrong, disastrous road. The Labor Party, so far, has proposed only some modifications which don’t alter the central thrust. The socialist forces in Australia, including the Communist Party, have yet to develop an alternative road, a new course for Australia in this respect, and I would like to suggest some central features of what that might be.

1. The main expressions of the energy crisis at present are periodical shortages of oil and an escalating price. Though these arise from various economic and political factors, not just a shortage of the material itself, they presage the fact that over the next decade or so oil resources will begin to decline and do so increasingly rapidly.

Much of the present thinking concerns finding alternative sources of supply (oil from shale or coal, tar sands, plants, and alcohol from plants) to keep up the present consumption pattern and its extension.

(At present, about 53 per cent of the energy consumption in Australia goes into industrial and commercial uses, 34 per cent into transport and 13 per cent domestic.)

Most of these alternatives should be encouraged, but as bridging measures to more far-reaching solutions.
But there is no way alternative sources could provide the quantities needed on our present consumption pattern. To illustrate: a shale oil plant producing 100,000 barrels of oil a day would produce also 150,000 tonnes of solid waste. Australia at present consumes over 600,000 barrels a day, so we would have to dispose of about 1,000,000 tonnes of waste a day! Therefore, radical alternatives have to be developed which provide for different social priorities, alter the form of our cities and change public transport pattern, improve the quality of life, modify attitudes to other nations, especially the under-developed ones, and foster new attitudes to nature and the environment.

2. The rising price of energy resources and the escalating amounts and costs of capital required to find, develop, distribute and convert them are major inflationary factors. These are multiplied because the oil companies are developing energy companies and using their monopoly position to screw even their capitalist "mates" as well as workers and consumers.

"The hike in oil prices has resulted in mammoth profit increases for the oil majors. Faced with a dwindling world oil supply they are diversifying their interests. Australia, with coal reserves totalling 36 billion tonnes, is a prime target."

— Stuart Simpson, *National Times*, 24.11.79.

3. Reliance on "market forces" to advantageously distribute resources is questionable in most fields, but is especially inappropriate for energy:

* Capital does us a good turn by chasing the highest profit because it goes where it's needed. But such considerations cannot in their very nature take into account the needs of future generations of people, or care for the environment because the "value" of these things can't be measured in dollars.

Still less can market forces do so when they are largely fictitious due to monopolisation. If the oil companies are able to repeat with coal and other energy resources the collusion, ruthlessness and exploitation they are already notorious for, humanity's plight will be grim indeed.

* Raising the price of Australian produced oil to world parity is done on the basis of "supporting market forces" and conservation. All it means is, as a Labor MP has pointed out, is that every petrol pump is a tax machine. And that tax falls, as usual, most heavily on the low-paid workers, most of whom cannot get to work without a car because of the nature of our cities. They have to go without other necessities. (In economists' jargon, the demand for petrol is very inelastic — so much for conservation.)

A burden similarly falls on the poorer countries, laying the basis for intensified international conflict. (Examples of the different amounts of energy used per head in different countries are: US 11.6 units, Australia 5.4, India 0.19, Ethiopia 0.03.)

Therefore, in this energy area especially, social needs have to take priority over private greed. This can only come about by social decision and political action.

4. Energy must be the first target for social control, and an essential condition for that is nationalisation. (It is not the only essential condition, of course, but it is a pre-requisite.) And the place to start is with oil and gas, then coal.

The Labor Party's plan for a Hydrocarbon Corporation to compete with energy multinationals, resources taxes, etc. are all very well, and can be supported as part of a wider campaign for full nationalisation. But by themselves, they will be inadequate to change the direction in which the energy multinationals are taking us.

5. The huge sums of money coming from high oil prices can and must be used to create new job opportunities in quite new directions.

First and foremost $1 - $2 billion a year should be invested in solar research, actual production, installation and export of equipment, energy conservation (for example, proper insulation of buildings), and large-scale development of railways and other public transport systems. This would still leave enough over for oil exploration, and a reduction in the price of petrol. (Oil exploration is costing only about $100 million a year at present.)
The government gets about $2 billion a year revenue from oil, and the oil companies also get huge amounts. The government has just declared that the Esso-BHP Fortescue field is “new oil” which the Financial Review estimates is a gift of $3.5 billion!

Such an alternative program to develop on a large scale the flow of energy from renewable resources is also needed to demolish the one remaining persuasive argument for nuclear power and eventually the breeder reactor.

If only one hundredth of the amount spent on research on nuclear weapons and nuclear power were put into solar energy, quick progress could certainly be made (see, for example, Barry Commoner in ALR No. 67, and Jobs and Energy, reproduced by Environmentalists for Full Employment).

Solar energy cannot, of course, provide all needs or replace all other energy forms. But it can make a decisive impact, and allow proper conservation of fossil fuels, mainly oil, gas, and coal for other uses including feedstocks for plastics, synthetic rubber and fertilisers.

And even motor transport, though difficult, is not beyond the possibilities of solar energy — for example, the use of fuel cells combining hydrogen and oxygen made available by using solar power to separate these elements from their chemical combination in the form of water.

CLASS AND SOCIAL STRUGGLE

The energy crisis and the issues it raises, which are so loaded with social and ideological as well as economic content, are generating wide debate which does not follow simple class lines.

But the struggle for an economically just and ecologically sound solution which will advance human welfare now and in the future is an essential feature of the struggle for socialism today, an essential feature of the class struggle, viewed historically.

It is no accident that Bob Hawke has chosen the theme “resolution of conflict” for his Boyer Lectures, and of his pursuit of the Labor Party leadership and the Prime Ministership.

Leaving aside the thin content of the first two lectures we get more to the nitty gritty in lecture three.

Here Mr Hawke pursues the fond hope that “objective discussion” between capitalists and workers in the form of a national conference, will bring about a consensus on the proper solution of unemployment and the social issues raised by the movement for women’s liberation.

The media promotes Mr. Hawke because it believes that the class collaboration he preaches and practises is the clue to the “stability” The Australian editorial says is essential to entice the energy investors.

This, plus the big stick contained in federal and state legislation directed against union and civil liberties, and the strengthening of the secret police (ASIO) is their program for our future politics.

But whenever were the people’s problems solved by collaboration with the class or classes who exploit them, or by allowing democratic rights to be taken away?

November 11, 1975 showed how much the ruling class believes in “consensus”. Have they changed in the meantime, except to get more arrogant, more greedy, more dictatorial?

The first year of the ’80s should also be a year of struggle, not collaboration. Of struggle for a nuclear free Australia in nuclear free oceans.

Of struggle for a new social direction with a new energy policy as a cutting edge.

Of struggle to win jobs for all.

Of struggle to expand the power of the people in factories, institutions and communities and repel the attacks on union and civil rights.

Of struggle to defend and improve living standards — to use the riches of the country for the people.

The forces to be overcome are great, but the stakes are high indeed — the decade of the ’80s could well determine the direction our society takes for a long time to come.

— Eric Aarons, 28.11.79.
Dorothy Healey and Richard Healey visited Australia in June to represent the New American Movement at the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of Australia. Up to 1973, Dorothy Healey, now in her sixties, was a leading member of the Communist Party of the USA. She had been a member for 45 years and for 25 years was Southern California organiser and one of the party's national leaders. She was one of the party's best known orators and popular figures. In 1973 she resigned after a long period as a dissident within the party. She later joined the New American Movement (NAM). When they visited Australia in June, her son Richard, 36, was National Secretary of NAM. Brian Aarons interviewed them for ALR.
Starting from today's reality, what are some possible political developments in the US?

RH: The US working class has not been in action in any mass way for years and years, in some ways not since World War II, maybe even the 30s. But the working class’s standard of living has been static for several years in the unorganised sectors — 80 per cent of the class. In fact, real income has declined steadily if only slightly over the last 10 years. There is also a variety of social pressures on the class, all in the general area of what we might call social disintegration, leading to an even greater atomisation of an already atomised class.

There is also a two-sided political pressure on the class. On the one hand, there is a certain disintegration or at least decay of labor’s ability to organise within the Democratic Party. On the other, there is also a much increased attempt by big business to dominate the Democratic Party. Four years ago there was a law passed which allowed organisations to create what they called “political action committees” (PACs) and big business has taken advantage of this much more than anyone else. Through the PACs they have channelled literally millions of millions of dollars into the two parties, but they have channelled over 50 per cent of it into the Democratic Party. They have realised that the Republican Party is less and less able to represent their interests because of its incredible minority status in the United States and hence are wanting to control the Democratic Party.

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Why is the Republican Party such a permanent minority?

RH: Firstly, it has been seen as the party of business and big business and the working class has been pretty clear that its immediate interests are not served by that party, except for presidential elections in which the Republicans can represent themselves as more universal. Secondly, to a larger extent than the Democratic Party, the Republican Party is controlled by its activists, who are very very conservative, very far right. Now, that means it is very hard for liberal Republicans to have much influence within the party and it has been pulled recently to the right. The probability of a Ronald Reagan being elected in 1980, or at least being nominated by the Republicans, is very great.

Getting back to the Democrats, this partial demolition of labor’s ability to control the Democratic Party was reflected very sharply in labor’s inability to get through Congress last year the Labor Law Reform, a very modest attempt to improve the ability of unions to represent workers, to get contracts signed. Labor expected to win on it, but lost. Big business came out squarely against it. Business sectors that labor thought would come over to its side came out against Labor Law Reform. One such very important group was the Business Round Table, which is the key executives of the 150 biggest businesses in the US, and is probably the clearest expression of monopoly capital interests.

In that struggle labor had absolutely no idea of how to go to its rank and file to try to fight for the Labor Law Reform. For many years they had totally put all their efforts into lobbying in Washington so that when that wasn’t sufficient, they only began to look for grassroots support among their own rank and file at the very end of the campaign, far too late to have any effect.

At the same time, partly as a consequence of this, certain trade union officials began to make statements which we haven’t heard for a long time. For instance, one said big business has declared class warfare on us. And the top officials of the AFL-CIO are feeling a squeeze from below, some restlessness from below, and pressure from above, both economic and political. Business attacks on unionism and business attacks on labor’s ability to deal in the Democratic Party successfully broke certain kinds of interests. That is, labor is being squeezed out of its role as a successful junior partner to “corporate liberalism” in governing the United States.

Very hesitantly, very tentatively, certain sectors of the labor movement began to respond. Around Labor Law Reform they started to go to rank and file to see if they could do anything. It was unsuccessful. Also unions like the United Auto Workers made an alliance with the National Organisation of Women: NOW would try to do some lobbying around Labor Law Reform and in return labor lobbied for the Equal Rights Amendment. For the first time in years labor made an alliance with a non-labor group to trade off those kind of issues.
Out of that experience and out of the succession of economic and political defeats, two coalitions have formed which indicate a certain potential within the class to change course. The first was the Citizens-Labor Energy Coalition (CLEC) formed by William Winpisinger of the International Association of Machinists. This coalition has been very important in trying to bring together community groups and trade unions around attacking utility rates and lack of safety in nuclear plants. They are not anti-nuke but they are pro-solar.

The potentially more significant coalition, formed on October 17, 1978 in Detroit, now called the Progressive Alliance, comprises about 120 organisations: 40 trade unions, and about 80 social groups ranging from the National Organisation of Women to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to consumer groups, the most important environmental groups and even two socialist groups, Democratic Socialist Organising Committee and New American Movement.

So far the Progressive Alliance has two major points on its agenda. One is to try to democratise the Democratic Party. It has said that Jimmy Carter has totally violated the Democratic Party’s 1976 platform, showing that the party has no control over its own officials.

The second is to work on some of the major issues of this period that no-one has yet worked on. They've picked out three:

* the question of the federal budget and putting more money into domestic issues. They are the only, important, major group that has really challenged Carter on his increase in the military budget and his decrease in social spending. (And they've mostly dealt in domestic aspects; they've shied away from foreign policy.)

* the departure of US capital from the United States in the form of plant shutdowns, plant removal, runaway shops. There is an attempt to pass a law, now introduced into both the Illinois and Ohio legislatures, that would force big business to give at least two years' warning of their intention and also to pay reparations to workers and the community.

This two-year warning enables you to organise against it. At present they announce on day one they are going and on day two they shut down. And for the first time the labor movement has said it has some right to question capital’s power of investment, the most crucial aspect of capitalist control.

* industrial causes of cancer, both in the workplace and in the community. This may be one of the most important issues in the 80s in the US because so many workers are furious about various carcinogenic problems.

In all this, the problem is not so much that US workers greatly believe in the free enterprise system as such. What they do believe in, still even in 1979 to some extent, is the possibility of upward mobility. But even this belief is being eroded by the fact that there are no longer jobs in the middle classes, in the middle strata, for working class children.

The greater problem is that our working class has not participated in any kind of organisation for years. Even the 20 per cent in trade unions does not participate in any organised fashion in their own unions. So they do not know how to organise, therefore don't believe there is really any way to change the status quo.

Hence you can pile crisis upon crisis upon their backs and it's not clear they'll react in any progressive way, that they'll respond, for example, to the Progressive Alliance. The Progressive Alliance could call local meetings to try to activise people but who knows if anyone will show up. Not because people aren't angry, they are. But firstly they are not sure who the right target for their anger is — should it be welfare mothers, their corporations, their foreman, or the Russians?

Because this is a working class that doesn't have any deeply seated instinct against capital as a whole. It does have instincts against its own employer but not against the capitalist system, it doesn't think in those terms. So we have to do a very basic job of even trying to get people to participate in this Progressive Alliance, and to redevelop in the working class some basic class consciousness.

The right wing has a much easier job of mobilising people because it does it around very elementary, gut-level issues of
scapegoating people, of saying “Look, your target is such and such...” An example is the white backlash against “affirmative action”, which means that the black and latino minorities and women have special access to jobs, to better training, to upgrading and won’t necessarily be fired on the basis of first come, first go. This principle was first undermined in a case concerning admission to schools. A white man applying to go to a medical school was not admitted and blacks who got lower scores on some tests were admitted. He successfully challenged the provisions and the Supreme Court upheld it, eroding the ability of blacks or women or latinos to get into the schools.

The Webber case now before the Supreme Court is much more significant because it deals with employment. Brian Webber, a worker at the Kaiser aluminum plant, got passed over for promotion and some blacks got it instead. If the Supreme Court upholds his challenge to that it could undermine almost all the gains that blacks have made in the last few years.

It’s much easier to rally white workers around that than around upholding affirmative action or the aims of the Progressive Alliance. And white workers are still the bulk of the working class.

The most pronounced rightwing mobilisation now is around the Right to Life movement which has managed to defeat some of the best senators and politicians we had last year. Even more striking was their ability to get onto the ballot in New York State. They formed a party, were able to get the signatures necessary and got 500,000 for their major candidate, which gives them permanent ballot status solely on the issue of Right to Life. The Right to Life is being used by far-right forces to try to build an entire, organised network of rightwing forces for the first time. There are some attempts to split that because there are a lot of Right to Life forces who are decent catholics but who respond on this one issue. It is not just the Catholic church — the Protestant evangelical churches are growing very rapidly, gaining members, and forming what amounts to a fourth national television network which has in most communities 16-hour a day programming of religious and conservative programs and has enormous viewership. All this is reflected in the youth movement, and the ability of cults to gain numbers when the left can’t.

So these crises on the working class are producing a break-up of the prevailing ideological consensus — what Gramsci would call an organic crisis — but it’s a very prolonged one. The left presently has neither the organisation nor the ideological capability of projecting an alternative to that.

From the other side, the crisis has led to an attempt at a new reconstruction of that hegemony around a far right alternative. That’s what the Right to Life movement represents, that’s what “law and order” represents, that’s what Brian Webber represents: a restructuring of corporate liberalism to a frankly much more regressive corporate rule. At present, we can only look towards the Progressive Alliance and the CLAC as a counter attack. The only organised forces are in the major trade unions and if they don’t respond then we’re in big trouble. What’s hopeful is that there are some positive responses.

Such as?

RH: The coalitions I mentioned, Barry Commoner’s present attempt to form a new political party called the Citizens Party, which bases itself on a real working class program on inflation, unemployment, the questions of minorities and women, on abortion, and very much on energy.

There is a great contradiction on abortion: Every opinion poll shows that increasing numbers of Americans believe in the right of women to have abortions. But the right’s ability to get activists on this is phenomena and the liberal forces, in particular the Democratic Party, is not based on activists. The Democratic Party is simply an electoral machine. It doesn’t really have members in the Australian or European sense.

How does it work then?

RH: It operates between elections with a number of functionaries who are paid by the party because of their fund-raising abilities. It has around those elected officials a very small number of activists, but in almost no city or state do we find Democratic Party clubs. At election time they will then pick people — depending on the election, maybe lots of people.
In lots of states people run as Democrats who are also members of the Communist Party, socialist groups or even rightwing parties. Essentially anyone can contest it. You just have to get a certain number of signatures on a petition and you then can run in any primary election to be the candidate for that office. For example, Congressmember Dellons from Oakland, New Berkeley is also a member of the Democratic Socialist Organising Committee. He is elected as a Democrat by that congressional district but he speaks as a socialist, he opposes almost everything about the Democratic Party, he attacks it, he says he's a socialist.

Who can vote in the primaries?

RH: At most places, you just register yourself and then on primary day you say which ballot you would like, the Democratic or Republican. In some states, like California, you actually have to say ahead of time which one you are. That’s to try to prevent Republicans from crossing over and voting for the Democrat they think would be the weakest candidate. But in lots of states you can do that and so you get some crazy results. In the US, in a hotly contested election, you get typically a 60 per cent turnout of registered voters, who may only be 50 per cent of all the people who can actually vote if they register. So we have very low turnouts. In a union election it’s even lower. You may have 10 per cent or less of the membership showing up for a union election. You may have 50 per cent showing up for a strike vote.

What is the program of the US ruling class for the worldwide and national crisis?

RH: A new tendency within the ruling class is exemplified by a special issue of Businessweek, which is our leading magazine for the upper circles of the bourgeoisie. In February 1979, it had a special issue called “The Decline of the American Empire?” with a picture of the statue of liberty with a tear rolling down her face. A more or less direct quote from it said:

“We have to be clear that the US has had an empire since the end of World War II but that we are in the process of losing it. History teaches us that an empire can be maintained only by direct military or economic force and we feel that that is the direction we have to go.....

This was with direct reference, for example, to the question of oil and raw materials, generally raw materials. There are signs that this approach is being accepted by large parts of the ruling class. I think it’s reflected in the attack on major unions such as the UAW, exemplified by the attack on Labor Law Reform and also by the way General Motors moved some of its plants to the south and did everything possible to prevent the UAW from being in those plants.

This goes hand in hand with an increasing drive to restore the draft, to get a sufficient number of white men in the army so that an invasion of parts of Africa or the Middle East becomes a credible threat, which it isn’t with an army which is 38 per cent black and increasing. There is an increasing anti-Sovietism and concerted attack on SALT II, showing a new militarist tendency within the top circles of American business.

There are still elements of big business which don’t agree with that, for example, those which back Teddy Kennedy. They still think that reforms and New Deal liberalism is the way to go, that there is sufficient give in the system, both economically and socially, to give the working class social reforms that would quell the problems. It’s not clear how they would solve the problems of profitability and of control over foreign resources — these are a huge question mark for that sector of capital.

Turning to wider questions: where are the US working class and people at ideologically and why?

DH: I would say certainly our working class, more than other working classes in capitalist countries, accepts as a natural law the right of capitalism to exist and to exploit. It’s a very militant class and has been historically, but even in the 1930s it was only approaching a developed class consciousness. So it was not an enormous achievement of capitalist ideology, from the late forties on, to even reconquer those sectors of the class that had been developed in the class struggles of the thirties and forties and had an advanced consciousness, and to almost eliminate that consciousness with the exception of a few unions.

I would say that the two most important changes were the expulsion of the left trade
unions from the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organisations) in 1948 and 1949, and then in 1955 the merger between the AFL (American Federation of Labor) and the CIO.

There were great illusions, great expectations that the industrial sector of the labor movement (mass production industries) would have an enormous effect on the craft sector (e.g. building trades) represented by the AFL. This was not true. On the contrary, a labor movement that was to the right of the Democratic Party in foreign policy, became the dominant expression.

Is there a trend, as in Australia, for white-collar unions to move into the AFL-CIO?

RH: Well, white-collar organising has come relatively recently to the United States. It’s something that’s really taken off since WW2 but even more in the sixties. One of the largest unions now in the AFL-CIO is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which now has well over a million members, primarily government employees that are also going into other kinds of private employment. There is a second union that has a large number, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE). All three of those are members of the AFL-CIO — and each has “blue-collar” members. For example, AFSCME covers sanitation workers as well as social service workers.

The fourth important union is the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) which has hundreds of thousands of members. It is a member of AFL-CIO. It was at one point one of our best unions in terms of good positions on social issues. It’s increasingly militant — for the first time teachers are going to jail around job actions, both for job quality and wages.

Unfortunately AFT has been taken over by an extremely right-wing leader who has a very tight grip on the union. He is in the mould of George Meany, the AFL-CIO leader, and is one of the many contenders to be the AFL-CIO heir apparent.

How did he become the teachers union leader?

RH: He controlled the New York teachers, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City and New York State. That’s the largest of the state federations and is a power base. He ousted a much more progressive person about five years ago — he is a member of the Democratic Socialist organising committee.

But there is one other teachers’ group, called the National Education Association, which is actually larger than the AFT. It’s a respectable association, not a union and that was its appeal for many years.

But with the attack on public employees over the last decade, it’s become progressively more union-like, has called strikes, and now advertises itself as being more militant and more ready and able to conduct strikes than the AFT.

There have been discussions of merger between the two teachers unions and in California they have merged.

One of the primary differences between Australia and the US is that many white-collar clerical workers are not organised, such as banking, insurance, and the mass clerical areas — primarily women who have entered the labor force in the last few decades. They are not unionised and no one has managed to organise them yet, though attempts are going on.

DH: The only really significant growth in union membership has come through government employees being organised. The total labor movement today represents only 22 per cent at most of the US workforce of 93 million.

Why is there resistance among the clerical workers to being organised?

RH: Organising workers is very different in the US. Here you have these government awards. In the US you have to go through a very complicated process of getting certification from one-third of the workers, then they go to a government board and ask for elections to be held. To just get a representative may take up to a year or more in which time the employers have every right to do all sorts of nasty things to the workers. It’s a very big organisational task, the union movement has been relatively slow to approach clerical workers, and they have always been contemptuous of women workers.

Correspondingly women workers have not regarded themselves as being permanent
workers. Why should they pay union dues? What would they get out of it? The usual kind of resistances which I think you may have some of too.

And when unions tried to organise clerical workers, they tended to use people who come straight out of the thirties. You might have 30 per cent black and latino women, and 60 or 70 per cent white women, all relatively young, and a handful of men, and unions send in men aged 50 or 60 who have never organised women in their lives. They worry just about wages instead of talking about child care, working conditions, dignity. The real possible breakthrough is coming not from our big unions, but from groups in several cities called Working Women, Women Employed, etc. These are women who have not been part of traditional unions but have been trying to organise women in these clerical areas. They are much more sensitive to the particular needs and demands of women but, so far, not even they have had overwhelming success.

In Chicago, for example, Women Employed has 600 or 700 women but not as part of the union. Women are very reluctant to join unions, they are very afraid of strikes, and it's going to be a very long-term process to organise areas like banking, and insurance.

What happens to workers who aren't organised into unions?

DH: They benefit from what the organised workers get.

RH: Organised labor has kept up with inflation relatively well and the unorganised sector, which is the mass of workers, has fallen behind. So when we say that American workers' real wages have stagnated now for 12 years, you really have to look at each sector. The UAW and the Teamsters have done better than inflation. Other workers have not.

DH: Some have what is called an escalator clause that provides for an automatic increase every year.

RH: It depends on the union. Some have cost of living adjustments, but, for example, the UAW gave one up in a contract six years ago because they thought inflation was going to be beaten. So at the last contract negotiation the membership stressed that they had to have their cost of living adjustment back in.

What are the issues that might motivate US workers back to an interest in socialism?

DH: One big issue for northern workers is "runaway shops" — industries which close down their operations in the north of the US, either to go to the south of the US, which is not organised, or to set up assembly plants elsewhere, for instance, just across the border in Mexico.

This means the total closure of industries in localities that have historically had steel, rubber and other basic industries.

Another major issue, increasingly important, is the pressures of technological change, where industry contracts and workers become redundant.

On the economic front, inflation is a major problem. The Carter administration's wage/price control is simply nonsense. Wage rises are supposed to be limited to seven per cent but most prices in significant areas of life are totally unchecked. In the last year most important victories in California, for instance, have been around rent control and in reaction to the property tax rebates that were given to landlords. Then there's the fear that is present in communities, mainly black and latino, because of uncontrolled police assaults on people. In my city, for instance, there have been some 50 people murdered by police in the last year. This is not political, but killing for the sake of it — and it's increasing. Really, the police are an occupying army inside the ghetto and the barrio.

So there's no lack of issues.

But the long-range objective is to develop a systematic and coherent response to the total decline of life in the US. We need the ability to join together the disparate issues in the country into a programmatic approach that unites the potential allies into a cohesive striking force on every level of the society.

Will extending democracy, in the workplace and throughout society, become an issue for people?

DH: Oh yes. It's still a minor issue in the sense of its articulation or the support for it, but there is no question that it will become increasingly important. It will be both a
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question of workplace democracy and union
democracy — democracy within the labor
movement — that will go almost hand in
hand, if it is to be effective.

What has been the social effect of the energy
crisis in the US?

DH: Remarkably it has led to an enormous
swing of opinion in favor of social ownership
of the oil companies. Poll after poll shows
that people feel the oil corporations are
responsible for the crisis, totally reject the
propaganda as to why there's a shortage in
the US and are demanding public ownership.
There is also recognition of the need for state
counterparts of the oil companies as a way of
checking the books of the oil corporations.
The federal government has absolutely no
way of knowing the truth about profits, the
degree of shortages, or the actual state of the
oil industry. Only the oil industry has those
figures and none of the government agencies
have them, so this adds to the feeling for
public ownership in order to determine the
accuracy of the charges.

So concern with energy issues has been one
of the most important upsurges in the last
year. The Three Mile Island nuclear accident
added to it enormously. Based on this, people
like Barry Commoner are now initiating a
movement calling for a new party in the US
on the grounds that the two existing parties
do not really provide for any response or
input from their constituents. They hope to
get this off the ground by the 1980 elections
and to get ten percent of the vote and show a
credible role in public life. I doubt their
ability to do that because of state electoral
laws. To qualify for a presidential election
you first have to go through 50 state
legislatures, and it's no easy matter.

But in a period of great mass upsurge it's
easier to get a response for a new party.

To what extent are American workers
developing an environmental consciousness?

DH: Many workers simply say “Yes, we
will die of asbestos poisoning in X years, but
what alternative do we have? It's our job.”
There is a great gap between the labor
movement and the environmentalists
because of that. Barry Commoner is one of
the very few who is sensitive to that problem
and attempts to meet it head on. He spoke at
an AFL-CIO Central Labor Council meeting
in Los Angeles and he started by saying:

when there is a conflict between jobs and
environmental considerations I identify
myself with the jobs.

But the environmentalists are
increasingly aware that they cannot
disregard the desperate feeling of workers for
security and that they have to find some way
to include that question in their thrust
towards an unpolluted and clean
environment. And there are some few
unions, most notably the International
Association of Machinists — similar to your
Metal Workers Union and one of the major
US unions — which are becoming aware of
wider social issues. It covers many defence
industries and is discussing a program that
there must be an alternative to the defence
industries, which are capital-intensive
anyway and don't really provide jobs to any
large extent and which produce non-useful
products. Their leader William Winpisinger
has also helped initiate a national movement
of labor and environmentalists that NAM is
also a part of.

Could you list the different main
organisations on the US left?

DH: The largest is the Communist Party
with approximately 7,000 members. The
Socialist Workers Party (Trotskyists) and
their youth group, the YSA, has a total
membership of 1,850. This makes them third
behind the Democratic Socialist Organising
Committee but this is not an organised
numeric force. NAM is fourth with about 900.
Then there are innumerable new communist
parties in the US. The Communist Labor
Party, the CPML, the Revolutionary
Communist Party, the Revolutionary
Workers Headquarters. These have small
memberships — 500, 300, 700.

What is the Democratic Socialist organising
committee?

RH: It's socialists within the Democratic
Party, but not quite so simple as that. In 1972
when they formed, they said that their
strategic goal was creating a left wing within
the Democratic Party, a progressive and
socialist wing. But increasingly within the
last year or two, we've been very pleased to
see that they've started looking at the
environmental movement, the women's
movement, and they have a Hispanic
commission which started working against
the blockading of Cuba, so they are
gradually diversifying. They are part of the Second International and have 3500 members. They are not really cohesive, nor activists.

DH: But they do have some of the more important labor figures in the US and black leaders such as Congressman Dellons, who is probably one of the Congress members most militant, most socially conscious, and most responsive to issues in the country. He is the vice-chair of the Democratic Socialist Organisation.

Speaking about the Trotskyists, the SWP, it really amazes me how they never seem to learn from history. They are regarded by all sectors of the movements as a very manipulative organisation, always with a private agenda which they seek to impose upon mass forces. That's true of the women's movement and it's true now of the nuclear movement. They have recently carried through what I gather their Australian counterparts are also trying to do, "industrialise" by sending members into industry.

They have the most simplistic definitions of political reality. They are a bit like the Socialist Labor Party, which has exactly the same policy now that it had in 1890.

It had a momentary influence and growth in the anti-war movement, which they split to set up there own sector, and they had a limited but nonetheless significant growth among students. But it amazes me that what they had they have simply dribbled away, leaving little impact on their organisation, policy, or influence.

But weren't they more open to the new movements — of women, blacks and so on — than the CP?

DH: They were, but in a very opportunist fashion and therefore they got very little out of it. For instance, for a while when the gay movement was at its height, they were very pronounced on that question. But, in each case, because they do it in such a manipulative way, they accumulate no real base from their support for such movements

And they are as bureaucratic an organisation as the Communist Party. For example, in the YSA in Berkeley their leadership was challenged so they simply flew in people from around the country, outvoted the branch and the dissidents, and took back control.

Could you say something about the evolution of the US Communist Party?

DH: There was one brief period from 1956 to about 1958 when overwhelmingly the majority position in the CP would have been approximately that of your party now: an insistence on independence internationally and a much greater sensitivity to new trends within the US.

The factors contributing to its lack of success were firstly that those who wanted a new direction were united on what they didn't want but not on what they did. Secondly, a number of leading comrades in a sense had one foot out of the party already and you cannot win a fight like that.

But what really defeated us was that the so-called centre forces around Dennis united with the ultra-left forces around Foster, although only momentarily because they saw us as the main threat due to our insistence on independence from the USSR.

The most important question really — though I can't really list them in priority, was that the party's position in regard to the Soviet Union was becoming even more subservient than in the 1930s, with far less justification.

But domestically the problem was equally as great: not only was the party oblivious to all the social upsurges of the 1960s but in many cases it took positions of outright condemnation. As an example, in the upsurge of the black movement the two most notable names were probably Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. But the Daily World in its front-page stories castigated Malcolm X constantly for adventurism and leftism, totally unaware and insensitive to what was happening in that sector of black society called the "street people": youth, those not yet in industry, etc.

Then, concerning the youth movement, there was an almost total absence from SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and from all youth campus upsurge. The party made as its main question the building of a communist youth organisation. Only in Boston and in southern California were there any young communists who were members of SDS. This occasioned great fights.

In the labor movement the party's position was very conservative. I said in a report to
the Party Convention in 1966 that the party’s position was really to become the business agent for the business agents, uncritical and supportive of whoever was the dominant leadership of the labor movement.

Now partly the labor response did reflect the 1950s, the conservatism and the fear of being isolated. But this hung on for a very long time — beyond when it was necessary — and it’s still present in the party.

Concerning women, you had the really ironic and tragic situation that up to two years ago the Communist Party and the John Birch Society were the two main organisations opposing the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment). Gradually the official position changed, without the party membership ever being involved in debate on it but suddenly they published an article supporting ERA.

Why did they oppose it?

DH: On the grounds that it took away the legislative gains that had been passed to protect women workers. But this saw women only at the point of production, as members of the working class. The question of social oppression was simply not recognised.

To what extent did the ruthlessness of the US ruling class — especially in the Depression and Cold War periods — create the situation of an embattled Communist Party in which sectarianism, conservatism and so on flourished?

DH: Well, I’m one of those who believe that you can’t really blame “objective conditions” for what happens to you. It’s always the pressure of any ruling class to do that to a communist party and the whole left.

The real question is which of your policies make it easier for them to carry that through and I would say that the main responsibility is our own, not the question of repression. As a matter of fact, it is notable that our great losses did not come as a result of the Depression or even the McCarthy period. Our great losses came after the Soviet party’s (CPSU) 20th Congress and our response to it. Of course, the ruling class attacks had a great deal to do with producing the mass social atmosphere of anti-communism but the greatest setbacks resulted from our own policies.

But it does seem that the US ruling class is much more ideologically aware and organised than say here, with all sorts of organised propaganda in favor of free enterprise.

DH: There’s no question that that’s very important. The anti-communist hysteria and the reaction to what took place in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, etc. all had an impact. But so did the ideas that we live in a free enterprise economy, and the individualism of the American dream that each one can make it, or that you’re responsible for yourself if you don’t make it, that society has no responsibility. These are still very dominant and in the 1950s they increased.

If there hadn’t been this problem of people’s image of existing socialism, would that have made much difference?

DH: Oh, certainly. I probably made more public speeches when I was a Party leader than most party members did and, without question, no matter what you talked about, the first question you’d get from the audience was always about repression in the Soviet Union. They’d ask: How can you talk to us about socialism as an alternative when what you have to offer is less than we have already won?

In 1960 I ran for Los Angeles County tax assessor (I received 86,500 votes — about 10 per cent — a very high vote for a public communist). The kind of question I’d constantly get as I went around speaking (when you’re on the ballot, automatically you’re invited to speak to any kind of group) would be: Well, if one voted for communists and changed one’s mind in six months, how could one be able to change back?

Now, such people weren’t necessarily against socialism. It’s very noticeable both in elections in our country and in England — I don’t know about Australia — that minor groups that have very little strength but who have the word “socialist” in their title, get either more votes than communists, or else very significant votes compared to those of the much larger communist parties. I think this question is a very serious problem and communists have to explore, if nothing else, an electoral ticket that includes the word “socialist”. This is a mass phenomenon
that one cannot disregard, one cannot ignore.

The mass meaning of different names varies so much from country to country. In our country there has been no mass expression of social democracy, so the New America Movement can define itself as “democratic socialist” which has a different meaning than it would have, for instance, in your country where the Labor Party uses that term. In our country, your term “self-management socialism” would not be understood, it would be a clumsy expression of what we are getting at — for the US, democratic socialism summarises more what we’re talking about. The left should understand that it’s how the masses understand it that’s important.

That raises the question as to why the US party went in a certain direction, while the Italian party, for example, went in a different one.

DH: Well, I would say probably one of the contributing factors, I’ll try to compare it with others, is the lack of a theoretical culture, an independent culture, an ability to relate to what is indigenous within the United States and to develop the capacity to deal with it, which made it possible for the worst kind of empty dogmatism to dominate the party.

I say “empty” because when one examines party history and documents of the past, there was not always the question of whether we were or were not always particularly correct, but there was at least a depth of analysis that could make coherent a policy. It might have turned out to have been a wrong policy but there was a rationale, a logic, or a particular analysis.

Since 1960 that has not been true. The party has been content with reports and speeches which are empty platitudes, sonorous generalities, the total absence of concrete analysis of any particular situation and therefore the ability to draw any conclusions from anything that is happening in this society.

With the different left organisations, each with a different base and constituency, what are the prospects for the socialist movement in the US?

DH: The problem is not that there is a different base and a different constituency, but that they are all warring and competing for the same base and the same constituency — the working class, the black movement, the women’s movement.

There has never been a time in our history when the left has been as irrelevant to the significant social movements as it is today. If you put together all those who call themselves socialists, Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, or what hyphens you prefer, you would not have more than 20,000 people in the United States. There is no immediate prospect of a breakthrough. Partly, this reflects the fact that from about ’73 until the energy developments, was very bleak for public protest movements. I don’t think in American history there has ever been a decade devoid of great social and political struggles and movements. The left can only grow if there is a mass environment for it to grow in, so it has been a very difficult period. For the first time, now, there is some sign that that long drought has been broken and there is at least the beginning of a renaissance of social protest movements.

Under what conditions can the left move outwards to the masses?

DH: I would consider questions of the Progressive Alliance as potentially important. It will compel, within organisations like NAM, an awareness of the real world, of the challenge of movements and the arena of struggle that is not doctrinally pure, a sensitivity to actual friends and not as we would like them to be among the working class or the women’s movement, or the black and latino movements. That would hold promise for us. At this point, there is no sign of a qualitative change in the left’s relationship to the working class and mass movements, but there is at least an acquiring of significant credentials to intervene in any of these movements with any effectiveness.

Our problem is enormously complicated by the status of the Democratic Party. While we are active, most organised sectors of the movement reflect themselves electorally within the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party can contain most of that and absorb it because it is not independently organised outside the Democratic Party.

This is a big problem because a movement which cannot have any kind of electoral representation or reflection, clearly has great limitations. You can’t fight in the streets for legislation and then not have an electoral or legislative approach to it.
Rudolf Bahro

The Alternative in Eastern Europe


Rudolf Bahro was released from prison in the German Democratic Republic in October 1979, under an amnesty proclaimed on the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR. He had been arrested in August 1977, and in July 1978 was sentenced to eight years' jail for "espionage". The act of "espionage" was the smuggling of the manuscript of this book to West Germany where it was published.

Bahro, then, was a political prisoner. His imprisonment aroused many protests among communist parties and socialists in western Europe and elsewhere. He differs from many others who have been imprisoned in that he remains very much a marxist and a communist, whose vision of socialism comes directly from Marx.

Bahro's book is immensely valuable, not only for those who are concerned about the future of socialism in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, but also for those concerned more generally about the transition to socialism — and communism — in advanced capitalist nations and more generally for all of humanity. Bahro's analysis intersects with this concern on such questions as the environment, consumerism, women's liberation, the division between intellectual and "manual" labor, and so on,
with issues that have come to the fore for communists in countries like Australia.

Bahro’s book is divided into three parts: The Non-Capitalist Road to Industrial Society; the Anatomy of Actually Existing Societies; and, finally, the Strategy of a Communist Alternative.

The first part, which need not detain us long in this review, centres around an analysis of Marx’s concept of the “Asiatic mode of production” and its characteristic form of “Oriental Despotism” as applied to pre-revolutionary Russia. Bahro engages in a lengthy analysis of oriental despotism of the past, which could be debated, but the relevance of it to the Soviet experience cannot be disputed: the Bolsheviks inherited what Engels described as the “natural basis of Oriental Despotism .... Not only the Russian State in general, but even its specific form, Tsarist despotism .... is the necessary and logical product of Russian social conditions”.

Bahro sums up his conclusions by listing those factors which were the “historical roots for the subjection of Soviet society to a bureaucratic State machine” : the “pressure of the technological superiority of the imperialist countries, enforced by their policy of military intervention and encirclement” ; second, the “semi-Asiatic past of Russia, with the inherited fragmentation of its agricultural base, with the extremely heterogeneous national composition of its colonialist multi-national State, with the political traditions of Tsarist autocracy going back to the despotism of Baty Khan and with the psychology of the masses still trapped to a large extent in primary patriarchy”.

Third, “the revolutionary situation itself” referring to what Bahro sees as the role of a strong state in any revolutionary transformation, including for the economic transformation. Here he quotes Marx on the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. Fourth, “the productive forces that had to be accumulated under the pressure of the capitalist environment, in order to create the preconditions of socialism, themselves bear an antagonistic character .... Via a principle of reward according to work that is in no way taken from Marx, the Soviet State has fulfilled the most important double function of achieving labor discipline and combatting the egalitarian tendencies of the masses. This was the precondition for economic advance in the conditions inherited from the Russian past .... the purpose was to accumulate more on this narrower basis that the capitalists whom it was seeking to overtake .... All in all, the Soviet state with the party as its core, was not the substitute for a working class too weak to exercise power, but rather the special substitute for an exploiting class”.

Bahro sees an inevitability, in the conditions of necessary primitive accumulation of capital as in Russia, in the dominating role of the state. At best, he concedes that the excesses of Stalin can be avoided, but that the basic form will remain. He quite specifically rejects the theory of “deformation” of the October Revolution “from Khrushchev to Garaudy” (via, of course, Trotsky), and seeks to show that “the political history of the Soviet Union is not one of abandonment of the ‘subjective factor”, but rather of its transformation, by the task it had to undertake of industrialising Russia”.

It is possible to agree with Bahro’s basic thesis that in conditions of isolation, a revolution in a backward capitalist country must inevitably and objectively proceed toward the dictatorship of a bureaucratic elite, which will also objectively tend towards “excesses”. However, the “subjective factor” can and must play a role. After all, the overthrow of capitalism is a conscious act led by a subjective force, in which the masses of peasants and the small working class rise above their condition and for no matter how short a time, become an historical force with a consciousness way beyond their objective cultural condition or possibilities.

Of course, as Bahro states, quoting Gramsci, after the revolution there is the process of “revolution-restoration” in which the legacy of history must be accounted for, and in which the objective forces are expressed, including among the working class and above all among the peasantry, but also among the vanguard — the Party.

As Bahro amply demonstrates, Marx, Engels and Lenin had no illusions about the
weight of these objective forces in countries such as Russia. But all conceived of the Russian Revolution being but the spark for Germany, and the advanced capitalist countries, where the working class there would respond. When, in Lenin’s last years, it became increasingly clear that Russia would remain isolated and that the revolutions in Western Europe would not achieve victory, Lenin sought to halt the bureaucratisation. One method was the formation of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate, which, as Bahro notes, became itself bureaucratised and under Stalin a means for his dictatorship.

The question of how far it is possible to limit bureaucratisation in backward countries remains a burning one, for it is in these countries that socialist revolutions are taking place, and where the same or similar objective conditions pertain and where the goal of primitive accumulation of capital is dictated.

In one sense, these revolutions are not as isolated, as the Soviet Union and eastern Europe form a powerful economic force which could objectively give the basis for lessening the ravages enforced by such accumulation. The problem remains, first because the aid offered is not, and for the foreseeable future could not be sufficient to overcome the basic problem, and, second, the fact that the Soviet bloc remains a bureaucratic dictatorship, and recommends, even imposes, its model on new socialist revolutions, leads to new revolutions falling for these reasons into the same pattern. All one can say is that some of the excesses of Stalin are avoided, particularly the forced collectivisation which still imposes such a heavy burden on Soviet agriculture.

Bahro mentions the Yugoslav and Chinese experiences a number of times, while deploiring the fact that in east Europe he must rely on western sources to know what is happening. This, of course, points to the problems someone like Bahro faces, particularly when studying China. In regard, for example, to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, this has led him into a too-ready acceptance of the verbiage of that particular episode.

Yugoslavia does, however, show that in given conditions it is possible to substantially combat the objective forces driving to a bureaucratic dictatorship, even when the process has begun. In China, the experience prior to the Cultural Revolution showed that transformation of the countryside could be tackled without the excesses of Stalin. There is good reason to believe that, in specific circumstances, particularly with a leadership aware of the fundamental problems, it would be possible to go beyond the Yugoslav experience, even in a backward country in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and latter-day Maoism, were in many ways rooted in this desire to skip the inevitable stages of capital accumulation, by a “forced march” using the techniques of pre-revolutionary guerrilla warfare and mass mobilisation to “leap” forward.

In one sense, it was an attempt to replace the mass terror used by Stalin as a means of labor discipline with mass political mobilisation, which implied self-denial by the masses and an end of “material incentives”, which, with the politically-inspired labor of the masses was to allow the massive accumulation of capital resources.

The “deformations” of the Cultural Revolution, denounced by Mao, were the effects of objective forces arising from the historical backwardness of China, distorting the ideal Mao had set. The end result was disastrous, with two decades lost. Now the Deng-Hua group is attempting the other road, offering the masses, and particularly the peasantry, the “material incentives” denied in the past, while exploiting the present world conjuncture to hope for massive western investment to escape from the iron grip of China’s economic backwardness.

At the extreme, we have Pol Pot’s Kampuchea, where the desire to go straight to communism, to physically destroy the total historical legacy, down to the most minute example, led to the massacre of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, guilty of carrying in their heads some aspect of the past, or of simply objecting to Pol Pot’s “experiment”. The end result was that the experimenters themselves came quickly to embody the worst barbarism of the past
which they claimed they were trying to destroy. Those who do not recognise historical necessity and try to “abolish” it, become consumed by it themselves. The continuing appeal of Maoist solutions, offering illusionary short-cuts around historical necessity, cannot be underestimated among the revolutionary intellectuals of the Third World.

They are on the other end of the scale to Bahro.

Bahro is not primarily concerned with such problems, but the legacy of such problems as they exist in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union today. His fundamental thesis is that the “stalinist superstructure” which continues is obsolete and that the “material preconditions of socialism are at least achieved far above that minimum that Lenin once took to be necessary”.

Bahro notes that Marx and Engels saw the preconditions already achieved in England of their time, and Lenin in Germany. No doubt, these were over-optimistic projections of the potential of the economy and of the working class at those times. Whether Bahro and most marxists of today are over-optimistic about the present level of productive forces in advanced capitalist and post-capitalist countries being sufficient for reaching socialism as defined by Marx and Lenin, will only be tested in reality. However, there can be no doubt now that the present level of productive forces is already testing the limits of finite resources. In such conditions, and given the analysis developed by, among many others, Australian communists, it is difficult to conceive of socialism which would necessitate a lunar colony! We will return to this later in this review.

The second part of Bahro’s book seeks to analyse “actually existing socialism”. Arising from the necessity of the Bolsheviks to organise post-revolutionary Russia for the primitive accumulation of capital, came the need for labor discipline, and the division of labor, which took a “traditional” form between manual and intellectual, between those who make decisions and those who carry them out. This, under Stalin, grew into a totally hierarchical and centralised structure, a structure which remains intact in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, if with some minor modifications (such as a much less reliance on terror).

Bahro sees the road to socialism as defined by Marx and Lenin as depending on the abolition of the traditional division of labor. Bahro insists that Soviet and east European socialism is stratified not into a simple dichotomy of working class and bureaucracy, as is claimed, for example, in orthodox trotskyist analysis, but rather into a series of social strata, organised on the hierarchical structure of these societies.

Bahro agrees the bureaucracy exists, but he denies the existence of the working class as a social class as it exists in capitalist society. “Individuals”, writes Bahro, “only form a class insofar as they stand in common antithesis to another class with respect to their position vis-a-vis the conditions of production and existence.... The proletariat loses its specific socio-economic identity together with the bourgeoisie, so that in the post-revolutionary situation it is necessarily completely different criteria, in fact criteria of internal structuring, that become relevant.”

Bahro repeats many times that the bureaucracy uses the concept of an existing working class, which supposedly rules in “actually existing socialism”, to mystify. And later, Bahro develops a thesis common to all oppositionists in eastern Europe: that it is the intellectuals who will lead change.

It is not true that the working class ceases to exist because its antithesis, the capitalist class, no longer exists. Classes are historical formations. The working class continues to exist in the transition to socialism because it is historically a specific class, whose task, as conceived by Marx and Lenin, is to carry out the transition to a classless society, which implies abolition of the traditional division of labor etc. and therefore its own abolition. Of course, it is necessary to look again at such concepts in the light of historical experience. But it is insufficient to point to the “atomisation” of the working class in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, or to the fact that they have no “leaders” of their own (p. 190). The atomisation of the working class and the destruction of its autonomous political or trade union organisation can be
explained by historical evolution, as a product of stalinist terror.

If, as Bahro argues earlier, the bureaucracy is the "substitute for an exploiting class", then it can be said that in "actually existing socialism" the working class is defined not by what under capitalism is its primary feature (i.e., its relation to the means of production) but what is under capitalism a derivative function, i.e., its relation to decision-making on the organisation of the means of production and distribution of the surplus.

Bahro proceeds, however, to categorise strata in post-capitalist societies within their "level of function in overall social labor": in five categories of, at the bottom, "simple and schematic compartmentalised and ancillary work"; next, "complex specialist empirical work"; "reproductive specialist work in science"; "creative specialist work in science", and finally at the peak "analysis and synthesis of the natural and social totality".

These are part of a simplified "sketch of the social structure of proto-socialist industrial society in its differentiation according to degree of education, level of management, functions of the reproductive process and branches of the division of labor in the particular sphere of the economy". It is, of course, fruitful, including in all capitalist societies, to examine the social strata within and without the principal classes. It is necessary, even essential, if any class analysis is to be of practical use, to not only examine the major classes but also the different strata within them, and to reject the so-called marxist analysis which denies that there are no strata outside the basic classes, or in the grey fringe areas between them.

Bahro's analysis and denial of the existence of the working class is also strange insofar as it denies experience in eastern Europe in recent decades. Bahro refers several times to the Polish events in December 1970, which were eminently an example of working class action and self-organisation, but, in common with many intellectual oppositionists, stresses rather the way they were "contained" by the apparatus with "reforms". Yet the Polish events of 1970, and to a lesser extent the events in Hungary in 1956, Berlin in 1953 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, concretely
showed that the working class does exist, unifying both the "old" and "new" sectors, and is capable of overcoming its atomisation and organising in a class way.

Of course, these struggles, while reaching towards socialist democracy, were often of a "trade union" character, arising as reactions against particular injustices or bureaucratic acts, similar in many ways to such struggles in the capitalist world, in their motivation at least. And as Bahro so eloquently illustrates, it is a question of a total transformation of the "proto-socialist" societies into socialist ones, involving the abolition of the traditional division of labor, a redefinition of total goals and so on. When workers' struggles, moreover, have primarily a "trade union" aspect, then it is possible for other forces to demagogically exploit them.

It is the nature of the transformation necessary — that is, not simply introduction of socialist democracy but also a "cultural revolution" (as defined by Bahro, not Mao) — which does imply a specific role for intellectuals and, above all, for revolutionary, communist intellectuals who are able to break out of the limitations of the intellectual strata as it exists, and to develop their own, full role in such a transformation. One of those limitations is the elitism and contempt for the "working class" which is so common, including among intellectually-trained workers themselves. That does not mean, however, to fall into the other limitation of intellectuals which is to idealise the working class which, rather than overcoming elitism, is only another expression of it.

But before continuing on this question, which rather fits in to the discussions of the last part of Bahro's book, we should examine his analysis of the nature and limitations of "actually existing socialism".

* * *

The driving force of post-revolutionary Russia and of all "actually existing socialisms" is and was economic growth, first to achieve the material basis for socialism and now to overtake the capitalist world. Bureaucratic-centralist planning within those goals, goals which are dictated in fact by the capitalist world as the more "advanced" competitor, operates in specific conditions which Bahro helps elucidate in a very useful way. Communists in advanced capitalist countries, because of a vastly different experience, find it difficult to grasp these conditions. Bahro places great stress on the importance economic competition with capitalism plays in "actually existing socialism". This contributes to continuation of emphasis on economic growth, within a framework determined by the more advanced competitor.

Second, because social and material positions depend on the place occupied in the hierarchy, "competitive behaviour between individuals in our system is ... strongly focussed on the phase of education, in which access and admission to favourable positions in the system of overall social labour is determined, with those strata who have already acquired education and influence holding the centre of the stage". (p.212)

Equally important, Bahro claims that in the GDR and other east European countries, "the content and character of labor, together with the opportunities for advance and development that are bound up with the job, have already overtaken salary as a motivational factor, and the more highly skilled people are, the more pronounced this tendency is". This "competition for appropriation of activities for self-development" has become the "specific driving force of economic life characteristic of actually existing socialism".

The nature of these societies, the "assumptions of its existence", require that the contradiction between the State and "the immediate producers does not become too marked", meaning that the State is "essentially ... in no position to enforce the same intensity of labor as capitalism can". Thus, "workers have a far greater opportunity to blackmail the 'entire society' than do the trade unions under capitalism, and actually do use this, against all surface appearance, even if they can do so only in an unfruitful way, i.e. by holding back on their output".

Thus, at both the level of the intelligentsia and the "immediate producers" there is movement. But each has its specific expression. The intelligentsia are enwebbed within a bureaucratic mesh which they
either adapt to, or find themselves in contradiction with.

As for the bureaucracy, Bahro presents a bill which draws both from Marx's own analysis of capitalist state bureaucracy, and the experience of "actually existing socialism". Bahro provides a major place for "bureaucratic rivalry" and for "bureaucratic inertia" within these societies, particularly among the "politbureaucracy". Compared with them, the technocrat "is a progressive figure (who)... is objectively working at the liquidation of his role, inasmuch as he sets progressive productive forces in motion, whereas the bureaucrat daily sanctifies the status quo".

"The indolence of the bureaucrat corresponds to the lack of interest of the worker and the dissatisfaction of the specialist... The modern productive forces, which are based more than ever on people being creative, are effectively braked by our bureaucracy precisely in their most sensitive zone." And the party is trapped within this "omnipresent spider's web by its own apparatus".

At the peak is the "politbureau dictatorship ... a grotesque exaggeration of the bureaucratic principle, inasmuch as the party apparatus subordinate to it is at the same time both church hierarchy and super-state".

There is no need to go into great detail here on how this leads to a lessening of potential development, which includes above all definition of the goals set and the ability to mobilise forces for such change.

The final section of Bahro's book is both its most important and most controversial. Bahro directly confronts the question of "utopianism" to which "marxists have a defensive attitude. It was so laborious to escape from them in the past. But today utopian thought has a new necessity ...

Today it is general emancipation that is the absolute necessity."

Bahro returns to a central theme — that economic conditions, the level of productive forces in advanced industrial societies, are or will soon be sufficient to consider the abolition of the traditional division of labor and "general emancipation" — and that the social forces are already present in "actually existing socialism" to achieve this goal.

Bahro advances the concept of "surplus consciousness" as one key concept for his "strategy": "today we have for the first time in history a really massive 'surplus consciousness', i.e., an energetic mental capacity that is no longer absorbed by the immediate necessities and danger of human existence and can thus orient itself to more distant problems... The problem is to drive forward the 'overproduction' of consciousness, so as to put the whole historical past 'on its head' and make the idea into the decisive material force, to guide things to a radical transformation that goes still deeper than the customary transition from one formation to another within one and the same civilisation".

This leads Bahro to his central strategic concept — a "cultural revolution" defined as "a transformation of the entire subjective form of life of the masses, something that can only be compared with that other transition which introduced humanity into class society by way of patriarchy, the vertical division of labor and the state. In this second cultural revolution, man will find his existence on his consciousness, on the 'highest mode of existence of matter' and concentrate on the social organisation of the noosphere so as to regulate his natural relationship anew from this point of departure".

It is unfortunate that Bahro uses the term "surplus consciousness" which certainly has idealist and even metaphysical implications.

Essentially, however, Bahro is advancing a thoroughly materialist concept: the high level of productive forces and the high cultural level of all sectors arising from it and necessitated by it, provide the basis for "general emancipation", or in the words of Marx and Engels in the German Ideology: "the task of replacing the domination of circumstances and of chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances".

The task is concretised by Bahro: expanded production, "this very avalanche of expansion in all material and technical dimensions, is beginning to exhibit a runaway character. The success that we had with our means of dominating nature is threatening to destroy both ourselves and all
other peoples, whom it relentlessly draws into its wake”. It stands “in global antagonistic contradiction to the natural conditions of human existence... The so-called scientific and technical revolution... must be reprogrammed by a new social revolution. The idea of progress in general must be interpreted in a radically different way from that which we are accustomed”.

Thus Bahro in the following pages takes up the concerns of many in the capitalist world: the environment and consumerism, which in the GDR is leading to the same waste as in the capitalist West. Bahro analyses how “consumerism” arises from alienation. He therefore concludes that “the overcoming of subalternity on a mass scale is the only possible alternative to the limitless expansion of material needs”. This is a very important conclusion, not only for eastern Europe, but also for the West.

It is already clear in countries such as Australia that material needs are manufactured and are pushed beyond bounds that are rational, healthy or ecologically sound. Under capitalism, these false needs also arise from alienation, while being sponsored in the drive for maximum profits. In “actually existing socialism”, it is alienation plus the continuous pressure of the need to measure up to the advanced capitalist world, that sponsors artificial needs.

There remain, of course, real material needs that exist and will continue to exist and which any society claiming to be socialist must fulfil. In Australia today real needs, such as housing, education, health and other needs which have to be largely fulfilled by public functions, are denied because the drive is to maximising profits which requires new, artificial needs to take precedence. It is not only, of course, a question of maximising profits, but of the capitalist state finding forms of social control and containment or diversion, allowing alienation to be channelled.

Bahro is right: only when there is a revolution in cultural options, a revolution against alienation, waste and artificial needs, can progress take place in advanced industrial societies.

In advanced capitalist countries, it is inconceivable that a revolution can occur which will be aimed at more of the same —
that is, fulfilling even greater material needs. Rather, it will be aimed at fulfilling real needs that are denied, while undertaking the same type of “cultural revolution” that Bahro defines as necessary in the “actually existing socialisms”.

As Bahro sums it up: “The question is to create the objective conditions so that everyone can prefer to know and to be, instead of to possess”.

Bahro outlines a program for such a cultural revolution, including such things as “the redivision of labor” in which all share not only in decision-making but in different types of labor; “a unitary course of education for fully socialised people” and “securing the capacity for education and the motivation to learn”, with “humanisation of childhood”, end to “sexual oppression”, patriarchalism and “personal communication” etc.

Some of these are, of course, also widely debated in the West, and no doubt many (including this reviewer) will find much to debate, to query or to reject. The point is not the validity or not of Bahro’s specific solutions, but his stress on these factors within a “cultural revolution”, as integrated within the total revolution he sees as not only desirable but necessary and possible.

After outlining such questions (which he returns to in the last two chapters), Bahro considers the “potential for a new transformation”, examining for example the Prague Spring, the hallmark of which was its aspect of “glorious revolution”, “of the appropriation of political power on the basis of ‘competence’.... it needed no special program apart from that of ‘pressing forward’”.

Bahro sees dangers in a movement which is simply a political opposition “not a political-economic, socio-economic and cultural opposition”. Such a “superficially political opposition” which, behind democratic demands seeks mainly to destroy the apparatus, “unfortunately” means for Bahro that probably “the minimal program of a democratic revolution against the politbureaucracy becomes autonomous, and demands a stage of its own”.

It is this fear which nags at Bahro and which he returns to throughout the last part of the book: that the rising nationalism in eastern Europe (and inside the Soviet Union) arising from Soviet heavy-handed domination, plus the lag in the west European socialist revolution, plus the dangers of an Europe-wide explosion ending in nuclear war, mean that “a planned evolution in eastern Europe would be the surest means to averting a later European conflict over this zone. Otherwise it cannot be ruled out.” Bahro expresses his thanks for west European communist support and advocates dialogue between those in east and west Europe. Unfortunately, in my view (and as things have turned out), Bahro seems much too optimistic in the evolution of “Eurocommunism” to power and socialist transformation in west Europe.

Bahro proposes the formation of a league of communists which would represent the “emancipatory interests”, that is those forces and interests in all strata which identify with “general emancipation”, the cultural revolution etc., which “puts the state hierarchy in its proper place”. Bahro rejects the concept of this “league of communists”, being a “working class party”, for reasons outlined earlier, and the league becomes “...the collective intellectual”.

Of course, Bahro shows some awareness of the inherent limits of intellectuals, but in fact sees the league as the party of the intellectuals which will unite around it all “emancipatory interests” from all strata.

In many ways, Bahro ignores (when it comes to the intellectuals) his own strictures concerning the effects of the traditional division of labor. While we are told much about the effects it has on the bureaucrat and the worker, little is mentioned about its effects on the intelligentsia as such (except when they are absorbed into the apparatus). The “pure intellectual” is, by omission, almost idealised and, in fact, this intellectual is the model for the future society.

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It is not, however, necessary to dwell on this important gap in Bahro’s theses.

After all, he has written a trail-blazing book, not only for communists in the
advanced industrial societies of "actually existing socialism", but also for those in advanced capitalist countries and, more generally, for the whole international communist movement.

Bahro is somewhat unique in that he is optimistic concerning perspectives for change in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. One gets the opinion that he did not believe that he would face prison after writing this book, and that there were forces, even in the top ideological apparatus of the ruling parties, that were of basically the same mind as himself. Let us hope that this is correct, although two years in prison shows that he perhaps underestimated the official reaction.

It is true, as we saw in Czechoslovakia, that the forces for change are potentially very strong, and that the resistance of the top apparatus, the "politbureaucracy", crumbled easily, and many at the top became leaders of change. No doubt, too, there are "Soviet Dubceks" waiting in the wings at the top leadership, as he claims.

Certainly, once objective and subjective factors ripen and combine, the task of changing the bureaucratic system and opening the road to socialism is much easier in eastern Europe than in capitalist countries, where the ruling class maintains immensely powerful ideological autonomous and active forces of repression.

Any such change in "actually existing socialism" would, of course, be an immense aid to the revolutionary movement in advanced capitalist countries as well as in the ex-colonial nations suffering from the horrific legacy of capitalist and imperialist super-exploitation.

* * * *

One thing is certain: Rudolf Bahro is a comrade, a communist of courage and perspicacity. His release from prison is to be welcomed and let’s hope that change begins within the framework he outlines.
America's military leaders are guiding for the final assault on what they view as the biggest obstacle to US military supremacy: the Viet Nam Syndrome. Stated simply, the Viet Nam Syndrome is the American public's disinclination to engage in future Viet Nam-type interventions in the Third World. While most Americans cheered the US withdrawal from Indochina and the simultaneous reduction in our "police" presence abroad, some US leaders have campaigned ever since to relegitimize intervention as a standard instrument of US policy. As discontent over long gas lines and higher oil prices has intensified, these apostles attempted to convince the public that military action may be necessary to prevent erosion of our privileged way of life. If the public can be persuaded to accept this argument, they believe, US policymakers no longer need fear domestic resistance to future interventions abroad.

At the same time that many leaders have campaigned for public acquiescence to renewed interventionism, official Washington has moved ever closer to a new consensus on the use of military force abroad. This outlook holds that while America cannot, and should not, intervene in every Third World crisis, we must act when "vital" economic interests — particularly energy supplies — are threatened. This new consensus is reflected in White House statements to the effect that America is prepared to use military force to overcome any threat to US oil supplies, and in the creation of a "quick-strike force" for intervention in the Middle East. But the implementation of this consensus will be
hindered, many leaders believe, so long as the public adheres to its “never again” stance on intervention abroad. Hence the stepped-up assault on the Viet Nam Syndrome.

The Viet Nam Syndrome can be seen both as an institutional matrix and as a subjective condition. Institutionally, this outlook took a number of specific forms: (1) passage of the War Powers Act and other legislative restraints on presidential war-making abroad; (2) abolition of conscription and establishment of an all-volunteer service; (3) curtailment of covert operations by the CIA and other intelligence agencies; and (4) adoption of the “Nixon Doctrine” and the creation of surrogate “police” powers such as Iran.

These developments had immediate and profound consequences for the entire national security apparatus. The Armed Forces lost half of their uniformed personnel, thus eliminating future openings for thousands of generals, admirals and other top career officers. The Pentagon budget was reduced (in non-inflated, “real” dollars), causing a significant drop in defense contracts. The CIA was forced to undergo an unprecedented public probe of its secret operations, and lost many veteran “spooks” through a massive layoff of senior personnel.

All told, it was the greatest institutional setback for the warfare state since the demobilization ordered by President Eisenhower after the Korean War.

More serious than these institutional reverses, however, was the subjective response. Once all US troops had been withdrawn from Indochina, the nation breathed a collective sigh of relief and adopted a “never again” stance on the use of US troops to control political changes in the Third World. Summarizing this perspective in 1975, Senator Edward Kennedy declared that “the lesson (of Viet Nam) is that we must throw off the cumbersome mantle of world policeman”. In the same spirit, Senator Alan Cranston observed, “The United States should be a peaceful world neighbor instead of a militant world meddler”. This view prevailed in 1976, when Congress voted to prohibit US military involvement in Angola, and again a year later when Washington elected to remain on the sidelines during the Ethiopian-Somalia conflict.

President Carter, who was elected when the Viet Nam Syndrome was at its peak, has generally adhered to the non-interventionist outlook expressed by Senators Kennedy and Cranston in 1975. Although some of his advisers — particularly Zbigniew Brzezinski — called for a military response to particular crises, Carter vetoed direct US involvement in such conflicts as the Zaire upheaval, the Iranian Revolution, the Viet Nam-China border war, and the Nicaraguan civil war. And despite evidence of a turnaround in Administration thinking, this hands-off approach still governs official policy: in a May 1979 speech to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance stated that “the use of military force is not, and should not be, a desirable American policy response to the internal politics of other nations”.

But for some US policymakers, this outlook is an intolerable constraint on US power at the time of growing challenges to American interests abroad. These leaders — representing powerful segments of the military, intelligence and business communities — argue that America’s unwillingness to use force in responding to minor threats abroad will only invite more serious and intractable challenges later. The Viet Nam Syndrome, in their view, actually fosters instability because it encourages hostile powers to exploit the emerging gaps in the West’s global security system. “Worldwide stability is being eroded through the retrenchment of American policy and power”, James R. Schlesinger wrote in *Fortune* after his dismissal as Secretary of Defense in 1976. “This growing instability reflects visible factors such as the deterioration in the military balance, but also, perhaps more immediately, such invisible factors as the altered psychological stance of the United States, a nation apparently withdrawing from the burdens of leadership and power.”

For these critics, US non-involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, and Iran represents a sign of American weakness rather than a calculated policy of restraint. “Viet Nam caused a loss of confidence in the ability of the US to defend non-communist regimes in Third World countries against subversion and military takeovers by Moscow’s allies”,


Business Week observed recently. "This perception of paralysis was confirmed when the US stood by helplessly as Russian-backed insurgents, aided by Cuban troops, took over Angola. And it was enhanced when the Soviet-aligned Ethiopian government crushed separatist movements in Eritrea and the Ogaden."

For advocates of a renewed interventionist posture, the Viet Nam Syndrome is not merely a misguided policy approach, but evidence of a far more profound psychological disorder. "Our internal preoccupations and our political divisions of recent years", according to Schlesinger, suggest "a growing infirmity of American policy". Frequently, these critics choose words with psychosexual overtones: America’s allies have lost confidence in "the firmness of American policy"; Europeans deplore "the faltering of American purpose"; American restraint has "created an image of US impotence abroad". (Quotes from Fortune and Business Week.)

Because Carter has generally upheld the non-interventionist approach, he has become the principal target for such complaints. Despite his apparent success at Camp David, he is often portrayed as "weak" and "indecisive" in responding to foreign crises. "The Administration's response to the multiplying challenges and disorders abroad", George F. Will charged in Newsweek recently, "has been a litany of things it will not do: interventions it will not contemplate, bases it will not seek, weapons it will not build. Its policy has been symbolized by two aircraft carriers, the one Carter vetoed and the one he changed his mind about sending toward the Persian Gulf'. The President's so-called "turn the other cheek" policy has also been the topic of frequent attacks by leaders of both major parties. Senator Howard Baker, for instance, has charged that Carter's failure to defend the Shah and other US clients "invite the interpretation that we do not have the will or the resolve to react under any circumstances". And in an extraordinary 1979 address to the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Senator Henry Jackson charged that the Administration's placidity in the face of growing Soviet belligerence has "the mark of appeasement".

These attacks culminated in March 1979 with a special issue of Business Week on "The Decline of US Power" which featured a dramatic picture of the Statue of Liberty in tears. Arguing that since Viet Nam, the United States "has been buffeted by an unnerving series of shocks that signal an accelerating erosion of power and influence", Business Week's editors called for a revitalized military capacity to protect US interests abroad. Without a more activist foreign policy, they argued, America's favored economic standing may soon
vanish. "The policies set in motion during the Viet Nam war are now threatening the way of life built since World War II."

The Business Week issue was particularly significant because it constitutes a rare public airing of the intense policy debate which has gripped the US business community ever since Viet Nam. This debate actually originated in the elite struggle over the war itself: after Tet and the appearance of a broad-based antiwar movement at home, the corporate world split into factions favoring the continuation of the war and others calling for an American withdrawal. After the war, this debate was transformed into a deeper conflict over America's role in the "post-Viet Nam" world. This struggle pitted those businessmen who felt that America's overseas interests could be adequately protected without recourse to military action against those who maintained that intervention must always be considered the "final solution" to America's political-economic problems abroad. The former group, which I have chosen to call the "Traders", argued that by expanding US trade relations with Third

World governments, America could play a sort of global managerial role in spite of continued ideological conflict with some regimes. The latter group, which I choose to call the "Prussians", insist that as the world becomes more turbulent and chaotic, America must use its military clout to prevent Third World upstarts from upsetting the global economic applecart.

For the most part, the participants in this struggle prefer to conduct their battles in seclusion — in corporate board rooms, private clubs, and exclusive Washington restaurants. Because the debates revolves around the basic underpinnings of American power, and because it is simply not possible to expose the inner workings of elite decision-making to public scrutiny (it is not proper, for instance, to tell a Congressional subcommittee that Cuban intervention in Angola is really good for America because it assures stability in Gulf Oil's Cabinda field), this struggle tends to be translated into other terms when conducted in public.

The most common expression of this struggle, of course, is the debate over the "Soviet threat". Because data on Soviet military strength is subject to a wide range of interpretations, disputes over the size and character of Soviet capabilities are often used as surrogates for the more profound contest over imperial policy. While the Traders argue that Moscow is far too preoccupied with domestic problems and growing restiveness in Eastern Europe to embark upon any major confrontations with the West, the Prussians insist that Moscow will use its awesome military muscle to dominate key Third World areas — particularly the Middle East — and thus to undermine the western economies. While both sides recognize that it is unlikely that Moscow would ever be foolhardy enough to threaten any really critical American interests, such as oil (despite all the talk of Soviet intervention in the Middle East, Moscow has been very, very careful to avoid any action that could be interpreted as a threat to western oil supplies) the Prussians argue that the mere existence of large Soviet forces might encourage maverick Third World governments to be more obstinate in their dealings with the West than they would be otherwise. Thus, when outgoing Secretary of Energy James
Schlesinger warned in August that the apparent “preponderance of Soviet power” in the Middle East increases Moscow’s capacity for “influence and subversion” of the West’s oil supplies, insiders understood that it wasn’t Moscow that he was worried about, but rather the growing independence of the Middle East oil powers. And when he called for a beefed-up American presence to discourage Soviet adventures in that area, what he really meant is that we must have the capacity to crush any indigenous challenges to US interests.

This same interplay between the “Soviet threat” debate and the deeper foreign policy struggle has arisen in the SALT debate. Although most of the discussion has focused on such questions as their relative size of the superpowers’ arsenals and the verifiability of the proposed treaty, the underlying debate concerns the perception of power insofar as it affects America’s capacity to dominate the western world. Thus, while no one really doubts that America can continue to deter any conceivable Soviet assault, critics argue that the appearance of Soviet might may act as a constraint on our capacity to discipline errant regimes abroad. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that pro- and anti-SALT senators are moving toward a compromise which will involve a massive expansion of America’s “general purpose” forces — i.e., forces intended for intervention and other non-nuclear contingencies.

The debate over renewed interventionism has also arisen in recent discussions of the Viet Nam war itself. While most Americans still believe that we were right to pull US troops out of Indochina, many “realist” intellectuals now argue that we’d be better off (i.e., no “boat people”, no Cambodia conflict, etc.) if we’d stuck it out in Viet Nam and demonstrated our “resolve” to protect US interests. Needless to say, it follows from this logic that if we were right to stay in Viet Nam in the first place, we’ll be even more right to intervene the next time a Viet Nam-type situation arises abroad.

As these debates proceeded, both sides have demonstrated assorted strengths and weaknesses. By choosing early to support Jimmy Carter in 1976, the Traders succeeded in placing some of their top leaders in high Administration posts. The Prussians, on the other hand, have proved adept at manipulating public opinion and at using the “Soviet threat” hysteria to undermine Administration policies. And while the Traders have worked wonders at Camp David and in other secluded diplomatic arenas, the inherent exclusivity of their approach (relying, as it does, on secret “understandings” between nominal antagonists) leaves them vulnerable to charges of “appeasement” — or at least of procrastination in the face of growing danger. As a result, the Traders have gradually lost ground over the past year and resistance to intervention (at least in elite circles) has significantly diminished.

This trend was already evident in January when the Traders suffered a particularly crushing blow: the collapse of the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran. With the Shah no longer available to serve as a surrogate gendarme in the Persian Gulf, the Nixon Doctrine evaporated overnight, and, with it, a major prop of the non-interventionist position. Although most experts agreed that there was little Washington could do to save the Shah, the very absence of any meaningful options was cited as proof of American “impotence”.
After Iran, it became apparent that top US policymakers had moved towards a new consensus on the use of military force to protect "vital" US interests abroad. The new outlook was unveiled on February 26, when the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Energy both announced that the United States would use force if necessary to protect its energy supplies in the Persian Gulf area. Appearing on "Face the Nation", Defense Secretary Harold Brown asserted that Mideast oil supplies are "clearly part of our vital interests", and that "in the protection of those vital interests we'll take any action that's appropriate, including the use of military force". On the same day, then Energy Secretary James Schlesinger told reporters from The New York Times that "The United States has vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The United States must move in such a way that it protects those interests, even if that involves the use of military strength or of military presence."

President Carter backed up these statements with a dramatic flexing of US military muscle during the Yemen crisis of last March. Although the origins of the crisis are steeped in tribal animosities and the fighting was confined to a narrow border area, Carter chose to elevate the Yemen conflict into a major East-West confrontation involving America's "vital interests". Arguing that the South Yemeni attack on North Yemen constituted an indirect threat to Saudi Arabia — and hence to American oil supplies — the White House announced emergency measures designed to prevent any further aggression by the Soviet-armed Southerners. Elements of the 82nd Airborne Division (America's standby intervention force) were placed on alert, and the aircraft carrier Constellation was ordered into the Arabian Peninsula. Fortunately, the crisis subsided once Arab League negotiators worked out a cease-fire, but it could easily have escalated into something far more serious: according to Jim Hoagland of the Washington Post, the White House was prepared to authorize the carrier's 85 warplanes to engage in combat if Soviet or Cuban pilots stationed in South Yemen joined the conflict.

The Brown-Schlesinger statements of February 26, coupled with Carter's muscle-flexing over Yemen, have been cited by observers both inside and outside the Administration as proof that official Washington has now recovered from the Viet Nam Syndrome. "This country went through a very deep philosophical-cultural crisis as a result of the war in Viet Nam", national security adviser Zbiginiew Brzezinski acknowledged in April, but "it is now emerging from that crisis". The Administration's response to Yemen, he noted, "signalled to others that we will use force when necessary to protect our important interests."

The events in Iran and Yemen also had a big impact in Congress. "The tide that swept back US intervention in Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Angola could now be turning the other way", The Washington Post reported in June. "Strong pressures are beginning to build up that could pave the way for a return to a more interventionist policy, based on military presence, to guarantee US access to foreign energy supplies." And in a comment that captures the mood of many in Congress, Senator Sam Nunn noted recently that, "I'd rather flex our muscles a little bit on a weekly basis than have to resort to a great display of force at some very high level of danger."

In response to these pressures, the Administration has announced creation of a "Unilateral Corps" for intervention in the Middle East. The Unilateral Corps — so-called because it would be independent of NATO and thus available for unilateral action by the United States — will consist of about 100,000 troops drawn from existing army, air force, and marine units, including the elite 82nd Airborne Division. Once organized, the Unilateral Corps will be available, on very short notice, for rapid deployment to distant trouble spots such as the Persian Gulf. The formation of such a "quick-reaction strike force" was originally proposed over year ago, but the pace of planning was reportedly stepped up in February, following the upheaval in Iran.

At this point, it is impossible to predict when, and under what circumstances, the Unilateral Corps will be ordered into action. Several scenarios have, however, received wide attention in the military press: occupation of Saudi oilfields to prevent their
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takeover by radical Arab forces; naval action in the Persian Gulf to protect oil tankers from attacks by Palestinian commandos; defense of North Yemen or Oman in the event of a South Yemeni invasion; and reprisals against Colonel Khadafi following Libyan-backed terrorist raids elsewhere. Whether or not any of these particular scenarios is played out is, of course, beside the point. What matters is that top US policymakers are apparently committed to the use of military force in the event that critical US interests are threatened abroad.

Such action — if and when it comes — will not, however, be a replay of Viet Nam. US war planners now have to contend with many constraints not present in the 1960s. First and foremost is the memory of the antiwar movement, which argues against a prolonged counter-insurgency war with daily footage of American corpses being flown back home. Economics also play a role: Viet Nam was an extravagant, fuel-intensive war which could not be repeated at today's oil prices without bankrupting the Treasury. And the runaway arms trade has profoundly altered the international military environment: whereas Vietnamese guerrillas were armed with relatively primitive infantry weapons, potential adversaries in the Middle East and Africa are armed with the latest French, Russian and American combat systems. All this means that any future intervention will have to be fought with much more precision, speed, and ferocity than anything we've ever seen.

The future "Viet Nams" will diverge from the original in another critical respect: the character of the rationalizations used to justify the war. Whereas the Indochina conflict was essentially (if unconvincingly) justified on the basis of "containment" — i.e., that stopping the Viet Cong was necessary to block further Soviet "expansion" into the Third World — any future interventions will be justified on more pragmatic grounds. US leaders recognize that the American public is far more concerned with inflation and the energy crisis than it is with convoluted Cold War stratagems. They believe, therefore, that the next Viet Nams will have to be sellable in crass materialistic terms: intervention is necessary, they will argue, to insure a steady flow of oil to the local gas pumps. There is also a danger of what Professor Richard Falk of Princeton University calls "humanitarian interventions" — i.e. Entebbe-type raids to free civilian hostages or campaigns to topple such troublesome despots as say, Colonel Khadafi, or the Ayatollah Khomaini. (The victims of pro-US despotics such as President Marcos of the Philippines and President Park of South Korea should not, however, expect such "humanitarian" relief.)

Whether or not the American public will swallow such justifications remains to be seen. There are still many prominent leaders who can be counted on to oppose military intervention no matter how it may be disguised, and the peace movement, though shrunken, is capable of fairly rapid mobilization. But the advocates of intervention clearly believe that most of the public's residual antiwar sentiment has been melted away, and that with an intensified propaganda campaign the "Viet Nam Syndrome" can be extinguished completely. When, and if, they conclude that they've succeeded, the appearance — in battle — of the Unilateral Corps will probably not be long in coming. Thus all of us who worked together to stop the Viet Nam war, and all those who believe in seeking peaceful solutions to the world's problems, have an immense responsibility to challenge the notion that intervention is in the public interest, and to advise Washington — as loudly as possible — that any repeat of Viet Nam will be met with instantaneous and unremitting opposition.
A writer for The Financial Times of London recently summed up the international aluminium industry's plans for investment in Australia as follows: "The aluminium investment plans for Australia amount altogether to some £1.5 billion. The sheer size of the total investment, together with the fact that nearly all the major companies are involved in Australian projects, marks a turning point in the development of the international industry."

The local processing of bauxite (into alumina and aluminium) is not the only local processing activity to be created or expanded: there are to be substantial investments in petro-chemical plants using Australian natural gas as a feedstock; a large steel plant may yet be established in Western Australia (especially if a direct rail link is built between Western Australia and the Queensland coal mines); Tonkin of South Australia is talking of a uranium enrichment plant; and a coal liquefaction plant is not at
all a remote possibility.

The recent report of "the Crawford Committee" endorsed the present Australian Government's desire to encourage "resource-based development" (2). The same Crawford had, with the now Foreign Minister of Japan (Professor Okita), recommended more or less the same thing for Australia in reporting to the Australian and Japanese Governments in 1976 (3). Spokespersons for the large international corporations speak euphorically of the prospects for Australian mineral resources over the next decade; but there is little benefit in prospect for Australian workers as a whole and, interestingly, there may be only small openings for Australian capital.

Roughly three-quarters of Australia's bauxite production is refined locally: at Gladstone, Queensland — by Queensland Alumina Ltd; at Kwinana and Pinjarra, WA — by Alcoa Aust; and at Gove, NT — by the joint ventures, Austraswiss and Gove Alumina Ltd. (4)

Of the alumina produced, over 90 per cent is exported — only somewhat less than 10 per cent is smelted locally to produce aluminium: at Bell Bay, Tasmania — by Comalco; at Kurri Kurri, NSW — by Alcan Aust; and at Point Henry, Vic — by Alcoa Aust. Two-thirds of the aluminium produced is used within Australia. The Australian production of alumina is about a quarter of total world production and Australia's present exports of alumina account for about half of the international trade in alumina.

New refineries are proposed for Wagerup and Worsley; the smelters at Point Henry and Kurri Kurri are to be expanded; and several new smelters will soon be built. The expanded smelting capacity is clearly the more important development.

Plans have been announced by Comalco to build a smelter at Gladstone, by Alumax (owned by AMAX of the US and Mitsui) to build a smelter at Newcastle, and by Alcoa to build a smelter in Victoria. Furthermore, several companies have begun investigating proposals for other smelters in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The first three new smelters plus the announced expansions of existing smelters will increase capacity in the Australian aluminium industry from 257,000 tonnes per annum to 860,000 tonnes per annum. Other smelters being considered could increase capacity to 1,200,000 tonnes per annum within half a decade or so, or to roughly the present capacity of the Japanese aluminium industry.

Energy for the smelters will be provided, in the main, by thermal power stations burning coal. According to the writer for the Financial Times (5), the aluminium producers anticipate that energy will be supplied in Australia at a much lower cost than in Europe, Japan and even from new generating plants in North America. In fact, aluminium exports are often represented as a means of exporting Australia's abundant energy. All the same, it is not inconceivable, given the rivalry between state governments.
in Australia, that the supply of energy to the aluminium producers will actually be subsidised by other users of electric power.

There are seven disturbing characteristics of the nascent aluminium industry. The clearest is that it will be in the hands of highly concentrated international capital. Six very large corporations currently account for 60 per cent of alumina capacity and 55 per cent of primary aluminium capacity outside the socialist economies (6).

Five of the six corporations are already involved in alumina or aluminium production (or both) in Australia. They are Kaiser, Alcoa, Alusuisse, Alcan and Pechiney. Alcan Aust is at least 70 per cent foreign-owned; Alcoa Aust is at least 51 per cent foreign-owned; Alusuisse has a 70 per cent interest in the Gove Joint Venture (Nabalco); Kaiser owns 45 per cent of Comalco; and Kaiser and Pechiney directly own 28.3 per cent and 20.0 per cent respectively of Queensland Alumina Ltd (QAL), while Kaiser owns a further 13.5 per cent through its interests in Comalco, another shareholder in QAL (7). Of the five current operators of refineries or smelters in Australia, only in Alcoa is Australian equity in excess of 30 per cent. (In Alcoa it may be as high as 49 per cent.)

The three new smelters already planned will be owned by Alumax (100 per cent foreign-owned), Alcoa and a consortium consisting of Comalco, Kaiser and five Japanese companies (8). The further projects, still being discussed but likely to go ahead within a few years, involve Alusuisse, Pechiney and the sixth of the very large corporations, Reynolds (of the US) (9).

The most significant aspect of foreign ownership and control, from the point of view of Australian capital, is that it makes it less likely that surplus created within the alumina and aluminium industries will be made available even within the country, let alone within other parts of the economy. Kaiser, for example, might export most of its surplus to finance a new steelworks in, say, Ecuador. Australian capital, except that part of it represented by large domestic corporations such as BHP and CSR, may also fear being squeezed out of the industry: the large international corporations may feel no need either to seek local “joint ventures” or to issue shares on Australian stock exchanges. And recent statements by members of the Foreign Investment Review Board and by Doug Anthony do not indicate that either the board or the federal government would be very concerned if the international corporations dispensed with offers of local equity (10).

From the point of view of Australian workers, the degree of foreign ownership and control has a bearing on the number of jobs available locally. Otherwise, however, it is the “privateness” and concentration of ownership of an industry that is important, rather than whether or not ownership is held by large foreign or large domestic corporations.

The aluminium industry is extraordinarily capital-intensive. When established, a large plant provides few jobs directly. Together, the proposed expansions of smelting capacity at Kurri Kurri and Point Henry, the three proposed new smelters in Victoria, NSW and Queensland, plus the two proposed new refineries at Wagerup and Worsley, are expected to add merely 4,500 new jobs (11). A total of some 6,000 temporary jobs will also be provided in the construction of the new alumina and aluminium capacity (12).

Just who will fill the permanent jobs is somewhat in doubt. The highly skilled technicians required to operate the smelters may well be brought to Australia from other countries. It is the immigration of just such workers that MacKellar, the federal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, seems to have been defending in a recent address to the infamously right-wing Institute of Public Affairs. (13)

The unskilled process workers will be recruited locally. The work done by this lower tier of workers in an aluminium smelter is, from all accounts, a very good example of Harry Braveman's “degraded” work (14). And few, if any, of the unskilled workers would ever acquire skills “on the job” that would enable them to enter the higher tier of workers.

The ownership and control of an industry by large corporations with substantial facilities abroad raises the possibility that very little profit may be reported locally. The large international corporations are clearly not subject to the threat that low reported
Appendix

EQUITY INTERESTS IN COMPANIES WHICH OWN AUSTRALIA'S BAUXITE MINES, ALUMINA REFINERIES AND ALUMINIUM SMelters

Alcan Australia Ltd.
70 per cent Alcan Aluminium Limited
30 per cent Public

Alcoa of Australia Limited
51 per cent Aluminium Company of America
20 per cent Westminer Investments Pty. Ltd.
16 per cent BH South Limited
12 per cent North Broken Hill Ltd.
1 per cent other

Comalco Limited
45 per cent Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation
45 per cent Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Ltd.
10 per cent Public

Gove Joint Venture (Austraswiss/GAL)
70 per cent Swiss Aluminium Australia Pty. Ltd.
(100 per cent Swiss Aluminium Ltd.)
30 per cent Gove Alumina Limited
51 per cent CSR Ltd.
13 per cent Peko-Wallsend Ltd.
36 per cent Australian insurance companies and banks

Queensland Alumina Limited
30.3 per cent Comalco Limited
28.3 per cent Kaiser Alumina Australia Corporation
(100 per cent Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation)
21.4 per cent Alcan Queensland Pty. Ltd.
(100 per cent Alcan Aluminium Limited)
20 per cent Aluminium Pechiney Australia Pty. Ltd.
(100 per cent Pechiney Ugine Kuhlmann)

Source: Dept. of Trade and Resources, as cited by Dept. of Industry and Commerce, op.cit.
profits may provoke take-over bids. Australian operations may be made to appear only minimally profitable by manipulation of the prices of transactions between the Australian subsidiary and other parts of the same corporation abroad. Exports by the Australian subsidiary may be "under-invoiced"; and imports may be "over-invoiced". Prices are administered in order to disguise the transfer of profit within the corporation.

Queensland Alumina Ltd provided, during the years of the mining boom, a good example of just what can be done (15). QAL (operating the Gladstone refinery) is and was owned by the refinery's principal customers—Comalco, Kaiser separately, Alcan and Pechiney. During the first eight years of the refinery's operation to 1972, QAL paid no income tax, although profits on its balance sheet had accumulated to $30.8 million. QAL was able to deduct from profits: (i) depreciation and investment allowances, (ii) interest payments on its extraordinarily high proportion of borrowed funds (evidently provided by the corporate shareholders), and (iii) past notional losses in its trade with its shareholder-purchasers.

Those purchasers of alumina registered in Australia were liable to pay tax on the difference between the price they paid QAL for alumina and what was deemed by the Australian Taxation Office to be the ruling world price of alumina. There is no information as to whether they did pay any such tax; but it would be surprising had the Taxation Office been able to put a successful case.

It is surprising that relatively small-scale Australian capital is not actively lobbying the Australian government for a tightening up of the taxation of international corporations operating within Australia. The less tax is paid by the international corporations, the more must be paid by Australian capital, except to the extent that more revenue can be extorted from workers.

It is claimed for Comalco that the new smelter at Gladstone will indirectly provide employment in Australia for some two and a half times as many persons as are provided with employment directly (either in operating or in constructing the plant). (16) That sort of claim can only be made on the basis of extremely doubtful assumptions. A very high proportion of contracts for the supply of equipment would have to be let to corporations producing within Australia. The Australian Mining Industry Council (AMIC) claims that this has indeed been the case with mining developments in general within Australia. (17) But even Susan Bambrick, well-known to be a defender of the mining companies, has avoided endorsing AMIC's claim. If much of the equipment needed for mining has had to be imported, it is much more likely that the highly sophisticated equipment required for processing will be imported. It seems unlikely that many manufacturing corporations within Australia will be able to supply the expanding processing industries.

The aluminium industry is highly polluting. In particular, smelting yields hydrogen fluoride, as well as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide. (18) Furthermore, the operation needs a large quantity of water for cooling. The aluminium industry is precisely one of those industries which has contributed substantially to Japan's present pollution problems. It may well be possible, not only to design less polluting plants than exist in Japan, but to locate smelters in regions in which they will do little harm. But if that is the case, there can be no guarantee that the relatively few jobs which the aluminium industry does provide will be provided near where workers and their families now live.

Finally, the provision of infrastructure for the industry, and for similar new mineral processing industries, will be a substantial charge on the revenue of the states. The governments of Western Australia and Queensland seem sure to be the most generous and will make it difficult for other state governments to be significantly less generous. As Terry O'Shaughnessy (19) and Garth Stevenson (20) have both argued, the Western Australian and Queensland governments have identified themselves intimately with international capital.

Their provision of electric power has already been mentioned but, in addition, they supply much of the housing and associated services, water installation, port facilities, roads, and so on. The states are thus advancing much of the constant capital for processing (as well as mining) while, as was earlier suggested, taxation of corporate
income is unlikely to transfer anywhere near as much of the surplus generated as the nominal rate of company taxation might indicate it would.

In all, the proposals for increased local processing of Australian minerals look very much like proposals for "free-trade zones" in South-East Asia. The major difference is that in South-East Asia corporations are being guaranteed large numbers of effectively oppressed workers on subsistence wages while in Australia they are being provided with relatively cheap energy. But it is significant that the Queensland and Western Australian governments are attempting to guarantee the supply of electric power by means of repressive industrial relations legislation.

No attempt is going to be made by the present federal government or by state governments to ensure that the new industries become linked with existing manufacturing industry in Australia. The Australian Treasury and the Industries Assistance Commission both deny that there is a problem. (21) On the contrary, there is arguably an urgent need to expand investment in manufacturing in areas beyond those in which any real investment has been occurring of late (food, beverages and tobacco and fabricated metal products and to devise means of transferring the profits of mining and mineral processing to this end. That much is needed by relatively small-scale Australian capital. Nothing less than substantial nationalisation of mining and public investments in manufacturing, along with genuine industrial democracy, will be necessary to ensure that the mass of Australians wrest control of their work and general living conditions from international capital.

Gavan Butler, 26.11.79.

FOOTNOTES


2. Report of the Study Group on Structural Adjustment (Canberra: A.G.P.S., 1979), esp. Vol. 1, Chapter 8. The Committee noted that "seventy per cent of Australia's raw material based exports are not processed in Australia".


5. Hudson, op.cit.


7. See Table 1, Appendix. About two-thirds of alumina and aluminium capacity is foreign-owned.


9. Ibid.


18. Hollingsworth et al., op. cit.


The Process and Means of Change

Max Bound

Introduction

The last decade has seen a remarkable advance in marxist analysis in a variety of areas. A very important work is Professor Barry Commoner's (1) marxist analysis of the “Eco-system — Production system — Economic system”. Commoner traces and demonstrates the close links of the three systems and documents the capital crises in the US. He indicates its dimensions and its implications for living standards and the capitalist system. He reveals the capital crises as a basic reason for reduced resources for health, education, housing and welfare. (My reading of Nixon Apple's review of Ernest Mandel's The Second Slump in ALR, June 1979, pp. 45-47, indicates that Mandel's empirical work supports Commoner's analysis.)

Marxist sociologists Francois Lamarche (2), Jean Lojkine (3) and others, have spoken of these as areas of collective consumption: “By collective means of consumption we mean the totality of material supports of the activities devoted to the extended reproduction of social labor power” ((Lojkine, 1972).

These and other analyses provide a valuable indication of how to further the analysis of struggles for worker control, to save industries etc. and how these struggles can be linked with struggles of people in their living situation. The present situation, I believe, poses the question — to what extent and how do these struggles raise the need for immediate, necessarily limited and partial, alternatives to the regulation of production by the world capitalist market — as part of the struggle for a self-management socialist future.

Growth— its role and limits

Growth is necessary to capitalist society because profit or surplus value (surplus or unpaid labor) created in production has to be realised in the market-place.

As capitalism increases productivity it, on the one hand, expands productive activity and stimulates the economy; on the other, it reduces the relative ability of the majority, the workers, to buy the goods their labor produces. Thus growth has always acted as a counter to the breakdown of the capitalist system.
The advance of technology in recent decades, given cheap and apparently plentiful but actually limited energy and resources, has assisted a prolonged period of capitalist expansion. This expansion has been also aided by continued and accelerated exploitation of Third World countries and a relatively stable socialist world market.

The present continued growth of structural unemployment is made the more severe because greater productivity increases the extent of the producers’ alienation from the fruits of their labor.

In capitalist society wear and war production is, among other things, a means of destroying surplus products. Today energy- and capital-intensive war industries provide less employment per dollar invested and, in this respect, are less of a stimulant to the capitalist economy.

This problem has been less obvious because the consumer society, necessary to modern capitalism, has developed a method of destruction of its own, namely, built-in obsolescence, frequent model changes, spare parts rackets, etc.

The problems capitalism, in its consumer society-stage, is facing include the finite nature of planet Earth. In many respects, energy availability and cost appears a more pressing problem in the immediate sense than other raw materials availability. This situation poses important questions of conservation of energy, an un-capitalist activity forced on capitalism. It also poses critical questions about alternative energy sources. Cheap oil, the main source of energy in recent decades, is becoming less available and the search for alternatives in commanding more and more attention and resources.

What is clear at this time in human history is that highly centralised, polluting, resource-destroying solutions, in terms of the human rights of future generations including the young of today, can only lead in the direction of disaster.

The advances in human knowledge and technology arising out of modern industrial and scientific practice have made it possible to destroy our living environment in a few short years. Capitalism is doing precisely that. Nuclear power is the most graphic and frightening example of this. But while the worst, to date, it is not the only possibility. The choice is capitalism — with which goes the consumer society — or a decent society able to utilise the tremendous benefits of modern science and technology, properly utilised, make possible. A large number of younger people perceive or sense that the consumer society spells human disaster but do not necessarily perceive it as a problem of capitalism. "If the bomb doesn't get us
something else will” is a widespread saying and expresses part of the frustration of the young.

The development and popularisation of a vision of a realisable, life-sustaining and humane future, to which present struggles can be seen to contribute, is critical in overcoming the apathy which helps sustain capitalism.

The Australian reality

The reality we face in Australia is that of a society with developed industry, advanced technology and a highly skilled workforce. A country which is controlled economically by multinational corporations and which these corporations, with the compliance of governments, are developing more and more as a supplier of raw materials for production in Japan, the US and Britain. Rudi Talmacs (4) points out that 75 per cent of Australian industry is more than 10 years old, compared with only 38 per cent of Japanese industry and 44 per cent of West German industry.

The imperatives of the capitalist world market discussed earlier demand, in the interests of its multinational controllers, destruction of much of Australia’s manufacturing industry because it is comparatively out of date. Evidence that this process and investment is underway in countries where police states provide cheap labor is presented in Australia Ripped Off. (5)

The Tasmanian experience

Tasmania has long been essentially a supplier of raw materials to interstate and overseas business interests. In recent years iron ore pellets and woodchips go direct to Japan. Earlier, the form of supply of raw materials included cheap (to the big corporations) electric power used in processing zinc, aluminium, ferro-manganese, etc. An industry using a lot of energy and raw materials is paper and newsprint production. When it was first established in Tasmania, it brought industrial development and employment. There is still industrial development. Between 1971 and 1976 output of paper and newsprint increased by 27,546 tonnes or 15.42 per cent but in the same period employment in the paper and paper-products industry fell by 1158 or 22.9 per cent. (6)

In Tasmania employment in manufacture has been falling since the mid-1960s from 33,959 (1966 census) to 31,532 (June 1971) to 27,664 (June 1976). A fall of 18.5 per cent in 10 years. Up to June 1976 the workforce had increased as compared with June 1971, government employment being the main reason. Other areas of increase were retail, finance, insurance, technical and business services and entertainment. Reductions in retail, self-serve, etc. and computerisation of office work, are among developments since June 1976 which indicate a likely fall in the areas of employment which increased from 1971 to 1976.

The number of persons registered for employment with the Commonwealth Employment Service increased by over three times from June 1971 to June 1976, despite an over 25 per cent increase in government employment.(7) In particular areas of the state there is decline — these include the Huon Valley where APM turns trees into pulp pellets for paper manufacture in Sydney. (Collapse in the apple industry is also a factor there.) In Burnie where APM’s fine paper operations are centred, both employment in that industry and the
population are declining. Another notable area of population decline is the once textile-based city of Launceston.

The degree of foreign and interstate control of Tasmanian industry is extremely high. The paper industry is controlled from Melbourne and Sydney, the Electrolytic Zinc Works from Melbourne. These companies are interlinked and their connections lead to multinationals in Britain and the US in particular. Woodchips and iron ore pellets go direct to Japan. Food processing is mainly controlled by Petersville, Kraft (US), Cadbury-Fry (British), and the local Henry Jones, now located on the north-west coast having closed up Hobart operations. Jones is connected with the Commercial Bank of Australia. Aluminium is controlled by overseas interests, TEMCO (ferromanganese) by BHP.

The problem is capitalism

Federal ALP President and Tasmanian deputy Premier Neil Batt, returning from a recent overseas visit, was reported in the press (July 7) as saying, "...Tasmania had to be prepared to compete on the world industrial market". Federal Labor leader Hayden is also on record as favoring the market economy and developing our competitiveness. The market orientation of Fraser, one of Australia's kept men, needs no comment here.

Such a course is surely doomed to failure. Barry Commoner, commenting about America, said:

Now all this has culminated in the ignominious confession of those who hold the power. That the capitalist economic system which has loudly proclaimed itself the best means of assuring a rising standard of living for the people of the United States, can survive now, if at all, only by reducing that standard. The powerful have confessed to the poverty of their power. (8)

The means of change

The working class's ability to impose a part of its will on the capitalist class has always depended in critical degree on both its activity and its unity. I am arguing that both activity and unity of the working class can be influenced positively by a clearer statement of positive and immediate, if limited, alternatives to the capitalist world market as a regulator of industrial activity.

There are a number of experiences in imposing or attempting to impose the collective will of workers on capitalists in other than wage and job conditions issues. In recent times the worker control struggles I am aware of all challenged directly the free operation of the capitalist market. In Australia Green Bans thwarted plans of the property capitalists and developers. Lucas Aero Space workers in Britain proposed new types of production. Fiat Auto workers in Italy impose different patterns of development (in the underdeveloped south). Renault auto workers in France proposed an end to built-in obsolescence and spare-parts production at various centres around the country. A resource- and energy-conserving, employment-creating, decentralising set of proposals.

At another level, a combination of harsh reality and political action by a broad anti-nuclear movement is beginning to affect investment decisions of some capitalists.

If worker control is about anything other than conditions of labor, pay rates, rights on the job (and it is about these), it is also about the nature of work, what is needed, what is produced, what it is possible to produce, what quality, how much, what for, etc.

The source of all theory is practice, direct or indirect, but all direct, if partial and fragmented, for some individual somewhere at some time. At the same time, ideas do arise from study of experience and concepts are developed in the process of rational thought.

The role of experts (political activists, organisers, politically conscious researchers, economists, planners, sociologists, etc.) includes bringing together the knowledge that comes from beyond a particular industry etc. and the knowledge resident in the workers in a particular industry or job. This creates a suitable framework for the development of policies. As is currently being demonstrated in practice, the class ownership/control question in transport and industry generally is critical to rail workers in struggle to defend their industry. So also are the energy/ecology crises.
The pollution, energy and space waste, and public costs brought about by excessive use of the private car becomes increasingly important as the cheap oil, that made it possible, becomes no longer available. In the near future, considerable numbers of people on low to middle incomes will no longer be able to run a private car as a commuter vehicle. The importance of these questions can be illustrated from practice.

A little over two years ago, Hobart rail workers shunted carriages into the path of a roadway being constructed through the Hobart railway station. The carriages were eventually moved, after several days, but not before railworkers had made some of their points. The public response to the railworkers' militant defiance of authority was such as to prevent a crackdown against them.

Tasmanian railworkers have long been in struggle to save the railways and this stood them in good stead. The public actions of a small group of public transport activists, from outside the railways, who understood and projected in various ways, including via the media, the energy problem and future needs for public transport were very important.

There were local highlights including the exposure on the media of the incompetence of the transport planners by a highly qualified and competent transport engineer which helped this process. But it was, at bottom, the understanding of the implications of the energy crisis and application of that analysis which motivated the non-railworker activists and helped a great deal in winning public support for Hobart railworkers.

Railworkers are at the centre of the struggle for a decent rail transport system in Australia. But who will say that if it were not for the outstanding work by union research officers and the activities of “Save Public Transport” groups, that the ARU would be in the potentially offensive position that, despite problems, it now clearly is, in terms of ideology as regards rail transport.

The problem of alternatives

The question of alternatives in many other industries is a more difficult one. The difficulty in projecting positive alternatives is partly a question of the level of practice but there is, it seems, another dimension to the problem. Massive sackings in textiles has left no problem of supply of textiles and the loss of over 1,100 jobs in paper and paper products in Tasmania has been accompanied by an increase in production.

Examples of the effect of technological change and restructuring of industry, much more dramatic, are well known. Many factors which earlier made industrial development a means of providing jobs and increasing standards now operate in an opposite direction. The process is immensely complex and there are contradictory trends within it. (For example, becoming ‘competitive’ by reducing the number of jobs might gain a market and jobs; another example, the resource rip-off does create some jobs and provides a stimulation which, in turn, creates other jobs but overall it kills job opportunities.) But the effect, in several industries and regions, and the overall result in Australian conditions is stark and clear. Staying in the world capitalist market system means ever-increasing structural unemployment plus other inroads on living standards.

Can we begin to move in a different direction? George McRobie of Intermediate Technology, London, argues that small industries can embody:

....the discoveries of modern science and engineering, in such a way as to reduce the cost of each workplace to a level that is within the reach of local communities to purchase and maintain. Such small-scale industries would be the vehicles of self-reliance, because, besides bringing diversity into local employment and making fewer demands on scarce capital and infrastructure resources, they are often capable of using relatively small “pockets” of local resources, of raw
materials, skills or energy supplies which it would be out of the question to utilise with large-scale technology. (One could add: and trying to compete on the world capitalist market - MB.) And generally speaking, people greatly prefer to work in smaller groups, and under conditions where more demands are made upon their skills and intelligence....

There is a growing realisation throughout the industrial and non-industrial world that the nature of the technologies developed by the rich countries is capital- and energy-intensive, violent in its demands on people, the environment, and the world's stock of non-renewable resources: that this technology is not only not reproducible throughout the world, it is incapable of being sustained, just as an ever-accelerating machine cannot be sustained. (9)

Some conclusions

McRobie perhaps ignores the "savage laws" (E. L. Wheelwright) which protect capital investments and needs, but his points about non-renewable resources and possible alternatives are well taken. This is particularly so if we recognise the importance of Professor Commoner's points about the capital crisis and how the need for public monies to maintain capital investment in high technology is drawing off funds from health, education and welfare services in the US. (10)

In Australia cuts in government spending include the areas of health, education and welfare. More public monies are needed to develop the necessary facilities and infrastructures to help the multinationals' iron ore, woodchip, etc. extraction exercise. The aim is to do this with the help of as much public money, as much profit and as little labor as possible. Not only is manufacture in decline in Australia but this decline in conditions of multinational control threatens the very government income basis which makes education, health and welfare projects possible. Programs which merely deal with problems of consumption cannot resolve the acute and relatively immediate series of crises we face.

As more workers are denied the chance to work, what alternatives to decline are there? Can projects based on McRobie's "self-reliance" concept be one means of mobilising people and providing localised centres of struggle against particular capitalist plans for destruction of particular industries and work opportunities? From an affirmative answer to the question, a number of issues are raised including the need for work on the integration of such projects into the general economy, and at the same time, into a strategy for self-management socialism; and matters of support in terms of action and resources.

Obviously there is no substitute for workers' action and initiative on these sorts of questions. At the same time, such initiatives are conditioned and made possible by a particular need and a perceived possibility. Discussion of these questions within the labor movement, in particular, can provide an atmosphere in which possibilities are more readily perceived and capacity to act on the possibilities increased.

REFERENCES


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7. Based on figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
DISCUSSION

One can easily agree with Peter Beilharz in his review of Baruch Knei-Paz's *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (ALR, April 1979) when Beilharz writes that "a critical marxism clearly needs to penetrate below the blanket endorsement and the vitriol which are popular currency in contemporary debate" on Trotsky.

Unfortunately Beilharz's "penetration" reflects ignorance and gross distortion which, one might add, is reflected in the poor bibliography at the end of his review. If one must try to “save” Trotsky from the “trotskyists” and stalinists, it is also necessary to “save” him from the academic marxists.

Equally, it is necessary to save him — and socialism — from the purveyors of "suburban commonsense" whom Beilharz seems to regard as the ones with the answers.

"Trotskyism can only be analysed as permanent revolution" Beilharz claims. Assuming he means Trotsky and not the varied brands of "trotskyism" current in Australia or elsewhere, it is an inadequate definition, but it is of course true that the theory of Permanent Revolution is the key to understanding much of Trotsky.

Beilharz's understanding of this theory is, however, to say the least, lacking. Best to go to Trotsky himself, to see how in his 1930 introduction to his *Permanent Revolution* he defined the three main aspects of his theory: First, "it pointed out that the democratic task of the backward bourgeois nations led directly, in our epoch, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day ...."

"The second aspect of the theory has to do with the socialist revolution as such. For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation .... This process necessarily retains a political character, that is, it develops through collisions between various groups in society which is in transformation."

"The international character of the socialist revolution which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of permanent revolution, flows from the present state of the economy and the social structure of humanity .... The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration ....""

It is important to note that the "democratic tasks" for Trotsky did not simply mean the establishment of political, bourgeois democracy but, above all, the overthrow of all pre-capitalist forms. In backward capitalist countries that meant an agrarian revolution, replacing feudal and other forms with capitalist relations of production. However, in the period of imperialism, the possibility was excluded of a bourgeois revolution such as occurred in Europe, in France in 1789 and elsewhere and in Japan in the late 19th century, which not only established bourgeois democracy but transformed the economy into a modern capitalist one in all fields.

The only way to test this first aspect of Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution is to examine world history over the past 75 years. Such an examination shows very clearly that in backward capitalist countries, despite numerous political revolutions and periods of bourgeois democracy none have carried out the "democratic tasks" of the bourgeois revolution, unless there has been a revolution led by communist parties. India is perhaps the best example of this. Despite some considerable industrialisation, the rural revolution has not been carried out, and so India has not carried out a revolution which will allow it to become an advanced industrial country.

The "socialist countries" have all proceeded in a short period of time from the "democratic revolution" to a "socialist revolution". This again confirms Trotsky's theory in its first aspect, even though the Communist Parties maintained the fiction in the period of the "National Democratic Revolution" that it was not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a united front with the "antimonopolist" bourgeoisie.

As the second aspect of the theory as outlined by Trotsky, it seems to me rather self-evident, from the history of the past 62 years, that the post-capitalist societies are not the perfect societies some may have believed in the Stalin period, which smoothly progress to a classless society.

Finally, it seems equally clear that it is impossible to consider a socialist revolution in one country in isolation from the total world revolutionary process. As for the argument, to which this point is linked, concerning whether it is possible to build "socialism in one country", this
has also been answered by history: unless of course one defines socialism as what already exists in the Soviet Union, etc.

One last note: much of the controversy about the theory of Permanent Revolution has come from the advocacy in advanced capitalist countries of the possibility of an “anti-monopoly revolution” which would, somehow, for an historical period, allow a Popular Front of workers’ parties and “progressive” bourgeois parties to nationalise all the major monopolies and yet not progress in a short time to a full socialist revolution, and that this could somehow happen in a single nation state. If Chile showed anything, it showed that a revolution cannot stop halfway.

Of course, some trotskyist sects deny altogether any period in which “democratic (or anti-monopolist) tasks” would be carried out in the process of socialist revolution. For them, it must be a one-day (or ten-day) socialist revolution in which all the tasks, “democratic” and “socialist”, are instantly carried out.

Beilharz’s criticism of Trotsky for “theorising automatic revolution” is really incomprehensible. If anything, Trotsky over-emphasised political leadership — the subjective factor — in which nothing is automatic but dependent on human decisions. It is even more ludicrous to claim that Trotsky ignored the problem that uneven development leads to bonapartism. Has Beilharz not read Revolution Betrayed?

Beilharz suffers from all the serious diseases of academic marxism exemplified by the Telos academics. Theories are abstracted from reality, to be tested by their own and other logic and not by history. Of course, Trotsky can be criticised as can Marx and Lenin and many others for telescoping history, for seeing the logic and underlying possibilities of revolution leading to them quickly becoming reality. Marx saw 1848 as a prelude to proletarian revolution. Lenin and Trotsky saw 1917 as the prelude to socialist revolutions in western and central Europe. Many saw the defeat of imperialism in Indochina as a prelude to a revolution in the rest of South-East Asia.

Revolutionaries are, by nature, optimists, because of the pressing need for socialism (above all in underdeveloped capitalist nations) and the objective possibilities. Beilharz picks this up in Trotsky, but ignores it elsewhere. But this revolutionary optimism is not the equivalent of seeing “automatic” revolution. Revolutionary optimism is a “motor force”, providing a subjective element essential in any movement or party. Of course, in itself it is insufficient. “Pessimism of the intellect” which allows an analysis of the enemy and objective countervailing forces is, as Gramsci summarised, vital.

I wrote earlier of “saving Trotsky from the trotskyists” and it is important to avoid identifying Trotsky with his followers (or epigones?). The latter, in their vast majority, and despite their differing orthodoxies, have become sects, dogmatising Trotsky and setting up an orthodoxy of their own invention. To try to understand these sects, it is of little purpose referring back to their God-head: it is necessary to analyse (if it is worth the time and effort), their own theory and practice in today’s world.

Trotsky is no God-head, any more than are Marx, Engels, Lenin or Gramsci. All — and many others — have made great and important contributions, not only in the past, but also to an understanding of our present reality. But only a creative marxism (or better expressed, scientific socialism) based on, above all, an analysis of our complex reality, can really utilise the heritage of the “Greats”.

Trotsky’s epigones (to use one of his favorite words) also inherit the tradition of the international. Here Beilharz has a point: the tendency to see World Revolution and concretely the European Revolution, as a relatively short-term possibility, led to over-centralisation of the world communist movement, and the acceptance, particularly in distant lands such as Australia, of the word of the “International Secretariat” or whatever, as gospel. Under Stalin, this centralisation was used to turn communist parties largely into instruments of Soviet foreign policy.

The differing “trotskyist” Internationals carry this centralisation to absurdity: every twist and turn dictated by the International leadership is applied, particularly in Australia, with iron discipline, independent of the local situation. We have a phenomenon of “stalino-trotskyism”...

But there are also dangers in a purely “national” marxism, for although ending the umbilical links with past Internationals as interpreted by Stalin, Mao, or for that matter, Trotsky, a purely national marxism runs the danger of a narrow parochialism, shutting out experiences and views from other parties and movements. While it is a necessary phase, perhaps of relatively long duration, to allow analysis of one’s own national reality and peculiarities, “national” marxism cannot ignore the international context. A new type of international, without big brothers or great leaders, overcoming nationalism and so on, and finding a new unity will, in my view, emerge in the future, combining internationalist analysis with national theory and practice.

Space does not allow me to take up other points raised by Beilharz. That is also due to the fact that I have not read Knei-Paz’s book. However, if Beilharz accurately reflects Knei-Paz’s analysis in his review, I can only say that, as always, it is necessary to go to the original source rather than rely on some “scholarly” crib.

— Denis Freney.
Overland: Ian Turner Memorial Number (76/77), $4.

The latest double issue (No 76/77) of the Melbourne literary magazine, Overland, is devoted to commemorating the memory of Ian Turner who died while holidaying on Erith Island, Bass Strait, at the end of 1978. It also marks the 25th anniversary of Overland's first publication.

The memorial issue contains several Turner pieces: the text of two lectures ("The Barassi Memorial Lecture", a half-serious, half send-up, discussion of the nature of Australian football, especially in Melbourne, and "The Whitlam Years"), a radio interview on November 11, and some poems and letters. Also included are speeches and tributes by Stephen Murray-Smith, David Williamson, Manning Clark, Noel Counihan, David Martin, Russel Ward, Clyde Holding and several others; poems by Vincent Buckley, Max Harris and Dorothy Hewett; and an evaluation of Turner as an historian by Bob Gollan. Apart from Dorothy Hewett's poem, it's an all-male chorus — a pity because a female assessment would have been interesting and appropriate.

To somebody who knew Ian best as a communist student leader in the 1940s, it came as a bit of a surprise to find that the tributes had as their main common element a recognition of his personal qualities — rather than his abilities of mind. But some praise him fulsomely as a thinker, writer and activist.

Ian Turner was undoubtedly a major figure in Australian intellectual life. Endowed with great natural gifts, he applied himself to developing his talents in several directions: as a fluent and compelling speaker, a brilliant writer and an inspiring organiser. At his best he had a rare personal quality which Russel Ward describes as an immense mana. "Such a person I had never met before and was never to meet again." Ward refers to his tremendous mental energy and Manning Clark to his great charm.

As an historian, Bob Gollan establishes that Ian Turner's major lasting achievement lies in the revised version of his Ph.D. thesis published as Industrial Labour and Politics in 1965. In his later years Ian turned his attention particularly to cultural studies. Although they produced no synthesis of the calibre of Industrial Labour and Politics, there is plenty of evidence that he was in Bob Gollan's words "one of the truly creative intellectuals of our time".

Russel Ward's tribute is one of the few that attempts to assess Turner's political ability and places him as potentially the greatest of all Australian political figures. This is high praise indeed, and rather difficult to discuss meaningfully. Turner was undoubtedly an outstanding public speaker, lecturer and advocate. In 1949 I saw him defend two radical students charged with disciplinary misdemeanours by a hostile Liberal Party-dominated Students' Representative Council chaired by the late Ivor Greenwood. The trial dragged on for three long nights but we witnessed an exhibition of exceptional, unflagging advocacy. Ian Turner would have been a great courtroom figure. But what of his political qualities?

There was great political potential there. He spent his best years in the Communist Party, mainly in student politics and the anti-war and democratic cultural movements. (Cliff Green's and Bert Vickers' tributes give a taste of Ian's work as the first manager of the Australasian Book Society.) He was expelled in 1958 for protesting at the execution of Imre Nagy, the Hungarian premier in 1956.

The special Overland includes a fascinating letter to W. J. (Bill) Brown written in 1956 at the height of the inner-party debate following the 20th Congress of the CPSU and following Brown's public retreat from his earlier critical position. It shows Ian as a deeply committed communist. He wrote that while criticism was essential in a living, vigorous party, it often came to be "only criticism of the means of fulfilling an already decided policy". What was most important was that it should not become "a substitute for serious discussion of basic questions of our policy and our theory .... we've all got a stake in our party and the sort of future it's trying to build in Australia".

Overland naturally stresses his achievements in his later political life in the Labor Party and in cultural politics. In the last decade of his life his explicit political position in the Labor Party and his alleged shortcomings as a marxist came under strong attack. (The marxist journal Intervention No 12, April 1979, carried his slightly over-generous but still remarkably balanced and articulate reply.)
His socialism became strongly linked to the need to uphold liberal values, which some of his critics regarded as a "cop-out". But as the letter to Bill Brown shows clearly his opposition to illiberal and authoritarian socialism goes back to the lessons of 1956, and before. Most probably he was following a tactical line he worked out in 1961 in a study of the Victorian Socialist Party, 1900-1920.

After his university days, Ian Turner's political potential did not find fertile ground in which to take root. The reasons were partly personal, but the most significant reason, almost certainly, lay in the times being out of joint and the disjunction between the working class and the intelligentsia, identified by Jack Blake in his book, The Revolution from Within, as a crucial element of stalinism. In Australia, national conditions accentuated these difficulties.

Thus Ian Turner failed to realise fully his possibilities as a political figure. However, his life and activity have been of great political significance, and we all owe him a great debt.

Roger Coates

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A Noel Counihan drawing of Ian Turner, reproduced from the cover of the special issue of Overland.
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