

THE
COMMONWEAL

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NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
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EDITORIAL

MARTIN CRICK

Welcome to what is a bumper Issue 3 of Commonweal

It is gratifying to see members contributing to our journal in such numbers, and with such a range of articles and reviews. This also reflects a general increase in activity across the Federation, with well-attended events in Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington and members active in their trade unions and supporting union struggles in education, health and elsewhere. Pride of place must go to comrade Heiner Benecke, Lyttelton port worker, who stood as rank-and-file candidate for the post of General Secretary of the RMTU. Given that the union is bureaucratic and unused to contested elections, and with the majority of the members of the union working in rail, and concentrated in Auckland and elsewhere on the North Island, he polled remarkably well, gaining almost one-third of the votes cast. His platform, which included democratisation of the union and amalgamation of the unions on the waterfront, elicited a very positive response from many members. In both respects he stands very much in the tradition of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and in this issue I have written about another

'Wobbly', Tom Barker, and his role in the waterfront strike of 1913. Heiner also argued for a revival of New Zealand's rail and coastal shipping networks, calls which all socialists can support, and he has also questioned the value of the union's affiliation to the Labour Party, a very pertinent question in this election year. The days of mass blue-collar unionism are long gone, public sector unions are largely pale imitations of genuine trade unions, and it is difficult to argue that the Labour Party is worthy of the name, an argument I pursue later. Several contributions to this issue are relevant here. Victor Billot reviews Cybele Locke's biography of Bill Andersen, which takes us back to the days when trade unions were still a force to be reckoned with, providing a level of economic security but also performing an educative role in arguing for social change, with Communist Party members like Andersen to the fore. Tom Roud, in 'class independence, socialism and electoral politics', whilst refraining from urging socialists to vote Labour, argues that for the foreseeable future we have to relate to the Party in some way. Harry Robson, in an article which bears more than a passing resemblance to the thoughts of J A Lee, argues at length for a return to the traditional social-democratic model of state intervention in the commanding heights of the economy, with public ownership and planning to the fore. He also suggests that a Labour government should focus on economically nationalist solutions to economic problems, emphasising domestic supply chains rather than international ones.

Members have been active in the literary sphere too. Byron Clark has been exploring the world of the 'alternative right' for more than a decade, at not inconsiderable risk to himself, and has now written *Fear: New Zealand's hostile underworld of extremists* (Harper Collins 2023), reviewed by Tyler West. Tyler himself has contributed to *Histories of Hate: The Radical Right in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Matthew Cunningham, Marinus La Rooij and Paul Spoonley (Otago University Press 2022), as has Mark Dunick. This volume of essays explores New Zealand's diverse radical right history, stretching back to the late nineteenth century, and shows that recent events are not some contemporary aberration. Indeed, some of the current ideas and policies of the radical right were relatively mainstream in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Tyler and Sebastian Potgeiter write about how South Africa's apartheid state has loomed large in the political imagination of New Zealand's radical right. South Africa features in this issue of *Commonweal* too, as Andrew Tate reflects upon his recent return to that country after over 30 years away and John Kerr examines the importance of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. Mark Dunick meanwhile provides an essay on the execrable Christchurch-based Kyle Chapman, an enduring figure on the far right, and his role in organising the National Front and Right Wing Resistance. Both this and Byron's book should be required reading for members—know thine enemy!!

Elsewhere in this issue we have the second instalments of articles on the lives of Daniel Guerin and Jimmy O'Dea. In what I hope will become a regular feature Sionainn Byrnes explains why she became a socialist. Given the current crisis in the health service, and as I write the health sector unions are gearing up for mass

demonstrations on 15th April, Jack Haines's suggestion that Cuban polyclinics might provide a model for New Zealand is most timely and thought-provoking. We have too reviews of the latest album by Scottish anarchist band Ashenspire, and of *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* by Aaron Bastani. Add to these the regular reports from the branches and all-in-all we have a veritable smorgasbord for readers to feast upon.

As Tom Roud notes in his report on the Canterbury Socialist Society we have had a noticeable increase in attendances at our events. There is an audience out there, an interest in socialist ideas, and yet we rely largely on word of mouth or people signing up to our email list at events to recruit supporters or members. What could a more active propaganda achieve? I asked myself this question after attending the Billy Bragg performance in Christchurch. Here was a large audience, obviously at least sympathetic to his view of the world, plenty of clenched fists and people singing along to the songs. How many of them know about the Canterbury Socialist Society? Some noticed the T shirts worn by a few of us, but 30 minutes spent before the gig, handing out leaflets, could have heightened the awareness of all. A propaganda opportunity missed! Some younger members of the Society asked for some basic introduction to socialist ideas, hence our *Socialism for Dummies* session (their choice of title not mine). Over 50, mainly young, people turned up, with many new faces. We can't wait for people to come to us, we should be proactive, and what better opportunity than an election year? Which brings me back to the question of the Labour Party.

In the last issue of *Commonweal* I castigated the Labour government for its failure to use its parliamentary majority to carry out any of the transformative promises that

Jacinda Ardern had pledged. At that time the opinion polls showed Labour trailing National and ACT polling strongly, leading to fears that we would see one of the most right-wing governments in New Zealand's history elected in October this year. And then a seismic event—Ardern resigned, saying she had 'nothing left in the tank'. Whatever one's view of her politics New Zealand should be ashamed at the levels of misogynistic abuse aimed at her, way beyond the normal hurly burly of the political landscape. How is one to view her premiership? She had charisma, she was a supreme communicator, her compassionate response to the Christchurch terror attack saw her admired world-wide. OK, during her first two years in office she was hamstrung by her coalition partner New Zealand First, but then Covid hit, her reputation soared across the globe, and in 2020 she won an absolute majority. Her government now had the opportunity to deliver the transformation she had promised when first elected Prime Minister. Did it deliver? No! As our comrade Victor Billot has pointed out (Newsroom 27 March), its decision to ditch the capital gains tax, 'a reform which would have been a symbolic and practical statement of intent', showed that Labour was nothing more than a centrist, status quo government at best, devoid of ideas, lacking in imagination, still in thrall to the neo-liberalism of the past forty years. Levels of inequality have soared, the housing crisis has worsened, the health service is failing on almost every measure. Education, climate change, the environment, all areas where much was promised but little or nothing delivered. Where policy was implemented, such as the restructuring of the health service and the three waters legislation, it was poorly communicated and ineptly delivered, thus causing much opposition. Co-governance likewise.

Whilst the occupation of Wellington's parliament grounds was in part prompted by opposition to the lockdown mandates and a mish-mash of conspiracy theories it was also a protest of those who felt ignored or neglected by the government.

Some have suggested that Ardern's was a tactical resignation, aimed at resurrecting Labour in the polls. If this is the case then, short-term at least, it seems to have succeeded. The latest Kantar poll shows Labour leading National by two percentage points, with Ardern's replacement Chris Hipkins with a ten per cent lead over National's Christopher Luxon as the preferred Prime Minister. This could simply be because Hipkins, like Ardern, was confronted by crisis immediately upon taking office, the Auckland floods being closely followed by Cyclone Gabrielle. He was therefore front and centre stage, with the opposition parties relegated to supporting roles, and he seized the opportunity to portray himself as the practical politician, promising to focus upon 'bread and butter issues' as opposed to the 'be kind' mantra of his predecessor.

More interestingly all the significant minor parties have shown gains, the Greens in particular with their best poll result in a year at 11%. On the current figures New Zealand would be heading for a coalition government, with Te Pati Māori or possibly New Zealand First holding the key to either a Labour/Green axis or a National/ACT one.

How should socialists approach parliamentary elections in general and the upcoming general election in particular? I have heard some say a plague on all your houses, there is no-one worth voting for, others that Labour is the only alternative to a grim National/ACT coalition, still more saying they will give their vote to the Greens. Unlike the United Kingdom, where the first-past-the-post system holds

out little or no hope for minor parties, here in New Zealand proportional representation does seem to offer an opportunity for those disenchanted with the major parties. Unfortunately there is no genuine left-wing alternative to Labour, not even a social-democratic alternative, there has been none since the demise of New Labour/the Alliance in 1991. David Grant's new biography of Jim Anderton, *Anderton: His Life and Times* (Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2022) is well worth reading for an understanding of why the Alliance failed to replace Labour from the left. How should one view the current Labour Party? Does it still deserve to be called 'Labour'? Is it any longer recognisable even as a social-democratic party, on the centre-left of politics?

The history of social-democracy dates back to the (19th, where it meant, quite simply, a belief in democratic socialism ie the extension of political democracy to the economic level, the elimination of capitalism and the institution of a broad-based workers' democracy. It was, in essence, 'organised Marxism', for all other than anarchists believed a peaceful revolution by parliamentary means was possible. All adherents of the First and Second Internationals were 'social-democrats', but the outbreak of the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the formation of the Third International changed all that. Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, derided parliament. 'To decide once every few years', he said, 'which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament—this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarianism.' He went on to argue that 'the real business of "state" is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries, and General Staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling



the "common people." Harking back to the example of the Paris Commune he urged socialists to convert representative institutions into 'working bodies', both executive and legislative at the same time. He also warned socialist parties of the dangers of reformism: 'first you have the mass party, then you do so well at winning over civil-social constituencies and pursuing social reforms that capitalism enters a progressive mode, which then means progressive capitalism begins to take hold in your party.' And that is, of course what happened to the mass Socialist parties of the Second International, in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Although at first arguing for a gradual and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism through democratic means, social-democracy now became synonymous with reformism, supporting a mixed/market economy and

**JIM ANDERTON
MEETING HIS
CARICATURE AT
BACKBENCHERS
BAR, WELLINGTON**

CREDIT:
WELLINGTON
EVENING POST

ameliorative measures to benefit the working class within the framework of capitalism. Social-democratic parties adopted Keynesian economic policies. At best they aimed to use the state to offset, correct, and regulate the workings of capitalism, mitigating its worst excesses, ‘capitalism with a human face’.

Perhaps the best example of social-democracy in current times is the ‘Nordic model’. In the Scandinavian countries we see a comprehensive welfare state, multi-level collective bargaining and social corporatism in a social partnership between employers, trade unions and the government. It provides an elaborate social safety net for its citizens, including free education and universal health care, all largely funded through taxation. Elsewhere neo-liberalism led some, the prime example being Tony Blair in the UK, to suggest a ‘Third Way’, a centrist political position seeking to fuse centre-right economic policies with centre-left social policies. ‘My kind of socialism’, said Blair, ‘is a set of values based around notions of social justice...Socialism as a rigid form of economic determinism has ended and rightly.’ It is more of an ethical doctrine, accepting capitalism as the mode of production but removing some of its unjust elements through social welfare policies. As such it is a very vague ideology, offering few specific commitments, but based on a spurious coalition between capital and labour. ‘Balanced budgets’ is their mantra, but of course balanced at the expense of workers: the disastrous public-private partnerships in the Health Service introduced by Blair’s Labour governments demonstrate exactly who gains from this approach. At best the New Zealand Labour Party might be described as ‘Third Way’. In its principles and objectives it talks about ‘a just distribution of wealth’, to be achieved through

‘co-operation...as the main governing factor in economic relations. Only once does the Labour Party mention socialism. The last of its objectives says that it aims ‘to educate the public in the principles of democratic socialism and economic and social cooperation.’ I have seen little to no evidence of the former, whilst the latter, as I have suggested above, is far removed from any genuine socialist thinking.’ In essence, to quote Victor Billot once more, the Labour Party is ‘a liberal organisation dominated by urban professionals who have not done too badly out of modern day capitalism, even if they feel a little queasy about some of the side effects.’ (*When the Left Were Actually Left*, Newsroom, 20 January 2023) It has no real coherent set of principles; one member, who knows Grant Robertson, said that he would find it impossible to say what he actually stands for. In fact the party no longer deserves to call itself Labour, let alone socialist; it has been co-opted into managing the system that it was actually set up to replace. Vision, the imagining of a better way, a better world, the presenting of a genuine alternative to neo-liberal capitalism, is the task of we few socialists. Aaron Bastani at least dares to imagine what a communist future might look like, even if we disagree with his utopia. Victor Billot says of Bill Andersen and his contemporaries, they were serious people with serious goals, ‘they saw a world up ahead where ideas like solidarity and human need were more than slogans’. (Newsroom, 27 March 2023) In this issue we read more about the inspirational life of Jimmy O’Dea, who never stopped fighting for those principles. It may be a long road but we must follow in their footsteps.



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MAY DAY

MARTIN CRICK

May Day / International Workers Day

There are, of course, two May Days. One has its origins in a mystic, medieval pagan fertility festival, epitomised nowadays by maypoles and Morris Dancers. But the other, International Workers' Day, emerged from the struggle for the eight-hour working day in the (19th, and particularly from that struggle in the USA. There, by 1860, workers had managed to get their daily working hours reduced to 11 from a previous norm of 12-14. The fight for the eight-hour day really picked up steam during the American Civil War. As Marx put it, 'Out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was eight-hour agitation.'

The struggle usually involved petitioning the legislature, but some urged more direct action. The 1884 convention of the Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada (forerunner of the AFL, the American Federation of Labor) passed a resolution 'that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labour from and after May 1, 1886.' On that day around 500,000 workers took action but three days later, on 4 May, the infamous Haymarket Massacre occurred. At that time there were 65,000 workers on strike in Chicago; when, on 3 May, workers at the McCormick Reaper

Works prevented scabs from leaving the plant. Police opened fire, killing four and wounding many others. A mass rally to denounce the killings was called for the following day, and during that rally a bomb was thrown into the police ranks, killing seven and wounding 66. In retaliation the police also shot down several demonstrators and wounded many more. Martial law was declared and eight men were arrested and put on trial: four were executed and one committed suicide in jail. There was no evidence to link any of the men to the bomb, and four were not even present at the rally. They were tried because of their militancy and their labour organising skills, the state seizing the opportunity to strike at the burgeoning labour movement and in particular the eight-hours movement. The Haymarket Martyrs became a cause célèbre for the labour and socialist movement throughout the world.

The AFL announced 1 May 1890 as a day when labour would enforce the eight-hour day with strikes and demonstrations. The leaders of the Second International similarly called for an international day of protest. More strikes took place in the USA on that day than on any single date in history. Not all protests took place on May Day; in the United Kingdom, for example, the protests took place the following Sunday, and in London alone over 300,000 workers rallied in Hyde Park. Initially it was intended as a one-off protest but the rising tide of trade unionism and the growth of socialist and labour parties world-wide led to it becoming increasingly popular, and in 1904 the Sixth Conference

of the Second International called on 'all Social-Democratic organisations and the trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on the 1st of May for the legal establishment of the eight-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for world peace.' It developed its own symbolism, the workers' Easter, a time of rebirth and revival; it adopted a carnivalesque aspect, with banners, flags, badges, art and sporting events. Walter Crane, socialist artist and close friend of William Morris, designed numerous cartoons to commemorate May Day.

For the most part organisers attempted to avoid confrontational demonstrations for fear of repression, but there have often been flashpoints e.g. during World War I Karl Liebknecht denounced the war before 10,000 striking workers in Potsdamer Platz; in Glasgow, following the arrest of John Maclean on a charge of sedition, Glasgow workers held mass strikes and protests on May Day. Right-wing/Fascist regimes have seen May Day as a symbol of working-class opposition and a threat to their power; they have either attempted to co-opt it, e.g. the Third Reich declared 1 May as 'National Workers' Day', or ban it e.g. Mussolini abolished it in Italy and introduced a Labour Day holiday instead on 21 April; Franco outlawed it in Spain and it wasn't celebrated again until 1975.

In the Soviet Union May Day was used to mount a vast propaganda show in honour of Soviet technology and military might. In Red Square troops and their military hardware paraded past Soviet leaders in front of huge stage-managed crowds. Similar parades were held in the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. After the break-up of the Soviet Union May Day was renamed 'The Day of Spring and Labour' in 1992. Although events are still held across Russia they are more low-key, part of the annual spring holiday, often



• A GARLAND FOR MAY DAY 1895 •
 • DEDICATED TO THE WORKERS BY WALTER CRANE •

marked by adherents of the old regime but also recently used by opponents to protest their grievances. Such protests are invariably broken up by the police, often forcibly.

More subtly the Labour government in the UK declared May Day a bank holiday in 1978, part of the process of co-opting organised labour. It was becoming little more than an observed ritual there, although events such as the miners' strike of 1984 and the anti-capitalist protests in 2000 lent it more significance. Elsewhere, it played a significant role in the Portuguese revolution of 1974 and the uprising against apartheid in the 1980s. By 2000 May Day was an official holiday in 66 countries, but ironically not in the USA.

MAY DAY
ILLUSTRATION
 WALTER CRANE 1895

So what of New Zealand? There were no May Day demonstrations here in 1890. Few would have known of the appeal of the Second International. However New Zealand unions, like their counterparts overseas, had long been struggling for shorter working days, and they held nationwide Eight-Hour Day demonstrations on 28 October of that year. This Labour Day parade became an annual event and in 1899 Parliament passed an act making Labour Day in October a statutory holiday, which it remains, although its historical significance is hardly recognised. Labour Day has overshadowed May Day in New Zealand, but it has not been completely ignored. The New Zealand Socialist Party held regular indoor celebrations. For example, in 1906 His Majesty's Theatre in Wellington was filled to listen to the Socialist Orchestra and speeches by socialist leaders. Perhaps the largest May Day celebration ever held in New Zealand was in Christchurch in 1932, the year of a bitter tramways strike. Over 10,000 workers marched to Cranmer Square, the parade led by a brass band playing *The People's Flag (The Red Flag)*, and the leading banner reading *May Day-International Day of Working Class Solidarity*. There was an afternoon rally in Lyttelton, and a packed meeting in the Grand Theatre in the evening, addressed by John A Lee, MP for Grey Lynn. In 1937 the Miners' Union managed to have a May Day holiday enshrined within their awards. In 1975

the Auckland Trades Council set up a May Day Committee, which organised a ball that year and in 1976. In 1977 it held a public rally and there have been May Day parades in Auckland ever since, the most recent in support of migrant workers and their families. Unions Otago organised a May Day rally last year in support of Fair Pay Agreements. In Canterbury a May Day and Labour Day Committee was formed following a May Day event held at the Canterbury Trade Union Centre in 2019, and further events were held in 2021 and 2022, with Socialist Society members active both on the committee and at the events.

The eight-hour day became law in New Zealand in 1936, and also in France. The USA followed in 1938. It has never been achieved in the UK. However, workers' and trade union rights gained in the twentieth century have been rolled back with the advent of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, and by right-wing populist governments. Here that anti-union, anti-worker legislation, the Employment Contracts Act, has created a climate totally unconducive to trade union organisation and May Day principles. As socialists we need to work hard to revive May Day as a symbol of the international struggle of the working class against the capitalist system. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote, May Day is 'the only unquestionable dent made by a secular movement in the Christian or any other official calendar.'

The Red Flag

Jim Connell was an Irishman from County Meath, and member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood before he emigrated to England. There he joined the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF). Whilst on his way home by train from a meeting during the famous London Dock Strike of 1889 he was inspired to write the

lyrics when he saw a station master raising and lowering his red signal flag. It was first published in the SDF newspaper *Justice* in December 1889.

Tune: Usually sung to the tune of the German carol *O Tannenbaum* although Connell disliked this as 'church music' and preferred the tune of the Robert Burns pro-Jacobite anthem *The White Cockade*. Billy Bragg and Dick Gaughan recorded this version in 1990.

*The People's Flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold.*

Chorus:

*Then raise the scarlet standard high,
Beneath its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch
and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.*

*Look round, the Frenchman
loves its blaze,*

*The sturdy German chants its praise,
In Moscow's vaults its hymns were sung
Chicago swells the surging throng.
(chorus)*

*It waved above our infant might,
When all ahead seemed dark as night;*

*It witnessed many a deed and vow,
We must not change its colour now.
(chorus)*

*It well recalls the triumphs past,
It gives the hope of peace at last;
The banner bright, the symbol plain,
Of human right and human gain.
(chorus)*

*It suits today the weak and base,
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place
To cringe before the rich man's frown,
And haul the sacred emblem down.
(chorus)*

*With head uncovered swear we all
To bear it onward till we fall;
Come dungeons dark or gallows grim,
This song shall be our parting hymn.
(chorus)*

**LYRICS:
JIM
CONNELL
1889.**

The Red Flag rapidly became a socialist anthem, a symbol of international solidarity, sung at Party conferences and demonstrations all over the world. For example, in New Zealand, *The Red Flag* was played by the Runanga Band at the conclusion of a burial service for Henry John Morris (aka Harry, born Henry John Vaughan, 1880-1920) in Greymouth, New Zealand on 11 January 1920. Henry had left Wales for New Zealand in 1908 in part to work in Government Mines far removed from

the rugged employment conditions of family-owned mines in Wales. Henry became locally prominent in the Socialist and Labour Movement, as he had been at home in Wales, which is reflected in his last wish for *The Red Flag* to be played at his burial. *The Red Flag* was sung at New Zealand Labour Party conferences until the late 1940s.

REPORTS

HAYDEN TAYLOR

Wellington Socialist Society Report

Haere mai, readers of *Commonweal*. The tone of our events may be dark at times, but these are indeed dark times. It may come as no surprise to readers of *Commonweal* that often it feels like political activity in the Capital amounts to a farcical popular front strategy, but rather than it being of any organisational solidarity between progressives and socialists, it is between parties and sects of one. We are asked to be constantly vigilant and at the ready for mobilisation, but with no real end in sight and where the means of mobilisation become the end in and of itself. We are asked to show our support for a mayor who has shown more solidarity with Big Capital than citizens of the Capital. And in the coming months, as the country prepares to enter the next election cycle, we will no doubt be asked once again to bear arms and prepare to battle a right-wing takeover with the Tories at the helm. As you will read later on in this issue, the real question for us as socialists this election cycle (like every election in recent memory) is to actually figure out if the contemporary left in Aotearoa are even asking the right questions. In this environment, temptations abound, we have stayed patient, at the pub, with our pints and our pins, doing what we do best.

The Wellington Socialist Society continues to make a considerable contribution to the refocusing of political discourse with those who are already on the left in the capital, while at the same time always keeping our doors open and providing a kāinga for those who have only recently found their way to the traditions of the left.

Since October last year we've held 5 events, and have maintained a very encouraging atmosphere throughout that time with new and familiar faces at each event. A big thank you firstly to our member Mark Dunick who, in October, spoke on *Making Rebels: New Zealand's First Socialist Party*, based on his Doctoral research done at Victoria University. Our November event was postponed due to a clash with Cybéle Locke's book launch for her latest publication, *Comrade: Bill Andersen: A Communist, Working-Class Life*. We thought it better that our energies be put towards congratulating and celebrating Cybéle's achievement. To that end, WSS hosted a post-book launch party at a bar in town and invited all who attended Cybéle's event. The gathering was well received and a wonderful occasion for our members who were able to connect and kōrero with veterans of the class war in Aotearoa of the mid/late 20th century.

After a well-deserved break over the summer months, the Society returned to business with *Who's Afraid of Fu Manchu: Sinophobia and the rise of Moral Panics in Politics*, a lecture by friend of the society, Tony Simpson. Tony covered an impressive amount of history in a very short space of time and left us to ponder as to what exactly should Aotearoa's role be in



a developing new Cold War between two powers that can't actually afford to be at war with each other. Perhaps the best analogy is that of the mice and elephants: when the elephants are stampeding, best to stay against the wall.

March also was one of the busiest months for the Society in the capital. First, we held an event for International Women's Day entitled *Between First and Second Wave Feminism, Communist Women's Activism in Aotearoa*, hosted by Pōneke's working class historian extraordinaire, Cybéle Locke. Cybéle centred her discussion on two communist icons of Aotearoa's proletarian history, Rona Bailey and Flo Humphries.

Our bonus event for the month was one that we shared across the Cook Strait with CSS. Paris Marx, tech journalist and podcaster from Canada, was on a tour of Aotearoa. The event, entitled *Tech Won't Save Us*, ended up being our biggest event so far, with some 62 people in attendance. Paris and I had a discussion on a variety of topics ranging from the financial crisis and the origins of the tech industry to the

geopolitical tensions born out of the Tech 'Arms' race fuelling the new Cold War.

For the rest of the year the Society has booked out most of our slots for events on the second Tuesday of every month. Upcoming events we have planned are as follows: a Social Democracy Panel, a public talk provisionally called *Adorno Lives* as well as one on the radicalism of the late 20th Century in Aotearoa. Further to these events the Society is looking to revive the Little Red Reading Group in the capital.

Wellington Socialist Society recently had its historic first AGM. I would like to congratulate Angus Crowe, Joseph Fletcher, Sean Ian, and Fergus Stratford for their successful election to their respective roles on the Executive Board. Well done comrades, it is vital that the Society has a board that shares the responsibility of running the day-to-day operations.

Lastly, it is with a heavy heart I sign off this report as Chair of the Wellington Socialist Society, as it will be my last. I have imposed a self-exiling to the United Kingdom for a couple years to conduct a communist secondment across Europe. I

**TONY SIMPSON
SPEAKS IN
WELLINGTON
CREDIT: WSS**

will be involving myself as much as I can in proletarian organisations, mostly in the United Kingdom, in order to learn what I can from their history as well as their contemporary struggles. It has been an honour and a great pleasure to have been involved in the Federation and despite my

absence I believe that what we have built in the Capital will indeed live long and prosper. Best wishes and much love to the future Board Chair of WSS. I am confident that whoever takes over this position, the Society will be in good hands.

Noho ora mai rā, nā

GARETH MCMULLEN

Otago Socialist Society Report

The Otago Socialist Society has entered 2023 slowly but steadily. We continue to hold monthly executive meetings (open for all members to attend), and we are planning more public lectures, panels, and

potentially reading groups for the rest of the year. We also intend to set a regular schedule for social events.

We held our first public event of the year on March 20th: an insightful retrospective lecture by member Tyler West on the Iraq War on the 20th anniversary of the initial invasion held at Yours, a cooperatively owned café and music venue in Dunedin's CBD. We're aiming to consistently record our educational events in the future, and these will be posted on our Facebook page.

TOM ROUD

Canterbury Socialist Society Report

Fraternal greetings this May Day to all our members, readers, and any partisans of the labour movement who come across this publication. Since the second volume of *Commonweal* was released the Canterbury Socialist Society has maintained our busy schedule of events, and seen in the New Year with some very convincing, high quality lectures and activities. Our numbers continue to steadily grow in the region, and it has been gratifying seeing more of both familiar and unfamiliar faces at our events. So far in 2023 the majority of our events have been 'standing room only',

with the *International Women's Day Pub Quiz* being overbooked (though we made the space).

An election year can pose some difficult questions for socialists. Few, if any, in the Society will see socialism on the ballot anywhere this election. Nonetheless there is a great deal of pressure upon socialists, even though our total numbers are still small, to lend vocal and enthusiastic support to the so-called 'left' electoral parties. Misplaced or not, this insistence that socialists must declare their intention to vote for the 'least bad', and in fact urge others to do the same, is as reliable as the outcome of any election—the working class is nowhere to be seen, and economic orthodoxy is to be followed in lockstep. Your main options may be around the prevalence of pride flags, or official state-led biculturalism, but little will shift as far as material politics are concerned.



Many, perhaps most, of our members will vote come October. A coordinated, class-conscious, long-term strategy towards electoral politics is not currently on the cards for us—but in this issue I try to begin a conversation about that. The great irony, of course, is that the same blackmail that says we must vote Labour (or Greens): ‘do you want National to win, huh?’, will also be an argument to never ever vote for an independent socialist party: ‘It will split the left vote, it won’t reach a 5% threshold, and then we’ll get National’. It seems we are stuck, then, to vote for Labour/Greens forever? Maybe not.

The question of strategy will, no doubt, be a large part of the content for our inaugural National Conference this year (Labour Weekend, 2023). Canterbury Socialist Society members are spearheading this project, as we will also be the

host affiliate for the conference. While the Federation of Socialist Societies has defined and limited goals as an organisation, our focus on education means an analysis of potential routes and strategies for socialist and working-class politics is well within our purview even if the Federation is not set up to be the organisation to pursue all aspects of any such strategy.

We in Canterbury look forward to meeting delegates—as large as possible—from all other FSS affiliates, in a spirit of comradely debate, conviviality, and camaraderie. As one of the executive members put it recently, politics begins when you sit down at a big table with one another. So we implore all members, and perhaps well-wishers, reading this and considering membership, to save the date for the Federation of Socialist Societies National Conference 2023!

**PARIS MARX SPEAKS
TO TOM ROUD IN
CHRISTCHURCH**

CREDIT: N
ROBINSON

OPINION

TOM ROUD

Class Independence, Socialism, and Electoral Politics

Election year is once again upon us, and the usual debates and discussions begin to be steadily and inexorably ground through the discourse mill. These can range from the inane to the asinine, with some far too rare moments of relief in the form of genuine insight. Whether you're a loyal supporter of a major (or minor) party, through to an anarchist decrying the foolishness of voting at all ('it only encourages them!'), there is a feeling of inevitability in both the debates about, and the outcome of, the election: 'Whoever wins, we lose'.

It may be an insurmountable task, but I intend to write something that is of the more interesting variety—somewhere between a musing and a proposal. This will require some context, meaning the common discussion points and their origins.

Left and Right—two sides of the new Party of Order

The political designations of 'left wing' and 'right wing' have their origins in the

French Revolution. In 1789 members of the National Assembly sat themselves either to right or the left of the president based on whether they supported the revolution (left) or the King (right). From this we get the idea of the 'party of movement', committed to progress, change, liberalisation, and the 'party of order', with a conservative commitment to maintaining the status quo.

Since these early days it is fair to say that representative democracy, elections, and the legitimacy of specific political regimes have changed and developed considerably. Suffrage itself has expanded in the West to almost all citizens of a liberal democracy, with prisoners being a notable exception in many states. So too the terms of engagement have shifted significantly. Few in the mainstream right-wing party in this country would have a particular loyalty to hereditary monarchy. Nonetheless, the dynamic of 'movement' versus 'conservation' holds.

Growing out of the Socialist movement of the early 20th century, the New Zealand Labour Party is quite a good representation of the 'party of movement'. Significant reforms in this country tend to be spearheaded by Labour, rather than their National Party adversaries.

The more well-known (and palatable to their loyalists) examples of this are the First Labour Government who, from 1935 to 1949, effectively established what became known as the post-war compromise: a form of liberal democracy and capitalist economy that sought to curb the worst excesses of a free market with state intervention in the economy and public

Now He Understands The Game

Solidarity, November 11, 1916.



**NOW HE
UNDERSTANDS
THE GAME**

CREDIT:
SOLIDARITY

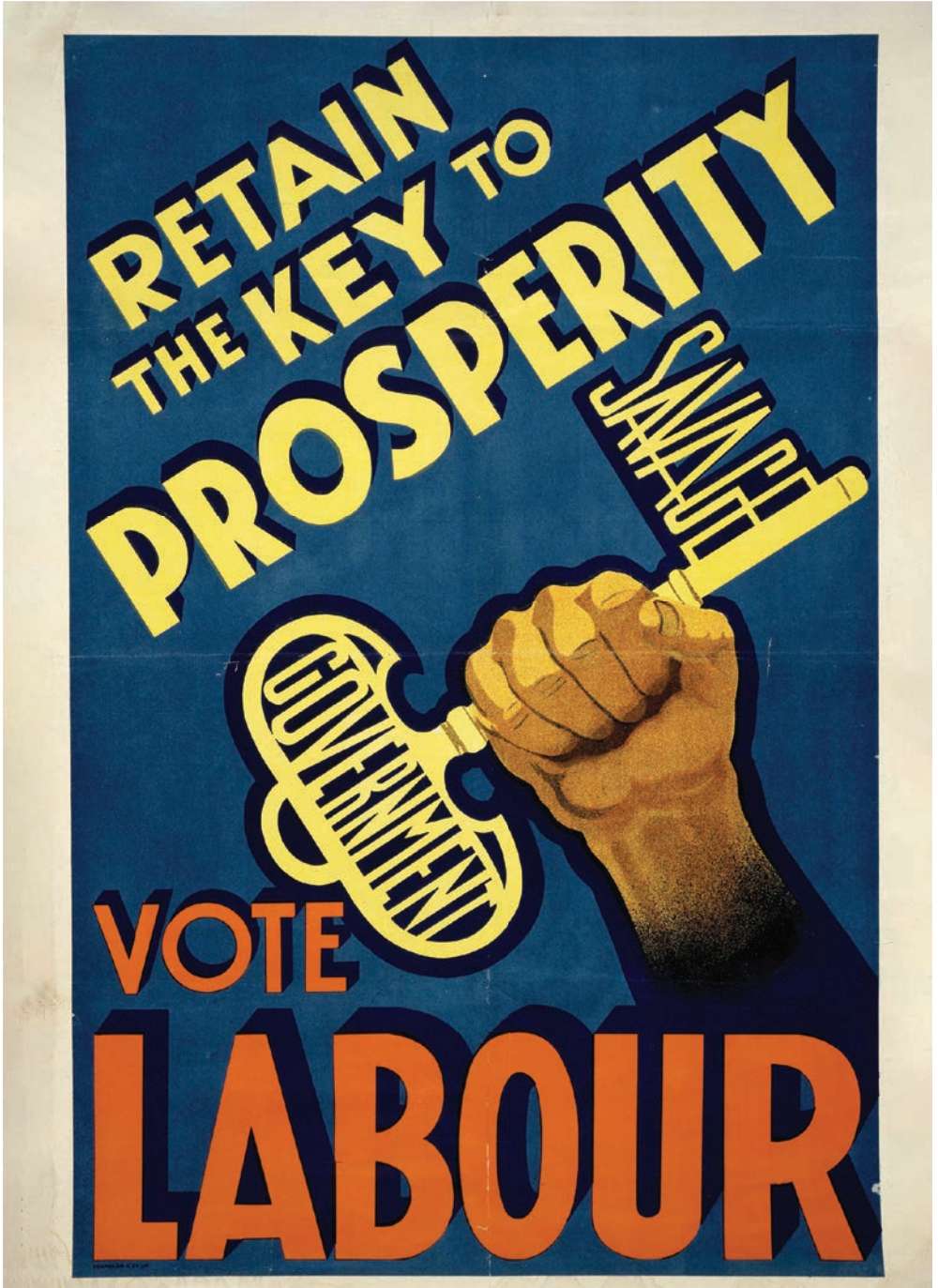
investment. Prior to this, governments tended not to burden themselves overmuch with the ravages of poverty, often leaving churches and civil organisations to aid the worst off, and they generally let the market operate as it saw fit. There were some counterexamples, Pember-Reeves and Seddon in the Liberal tradition here, or Bismarck's *Staatssozialismus* (state socialism) reforms in the late 19th century. While the United-Reform Coalition (later National Party) had begun to shift some of its economic thinking as the Great Depression deepened, it was Labour's electoral victory in 1935 that set the course for the country for much of the rest of that century. While National would still govern more often than Labour, the basics were established and largely left in place for some time.

As oil shocks and other economic pressures started to impact New Zealand in

the 1970s, Labour once again proved its worth as the 'party of movement'. This time, however, the fourth Labour Government elected in 1984 determined that state bureaucracy, intervention in the market, and investment to alleviate the suffering of the worst-off in society was precisely the problem to be solved. With an extraordinary programme now known well as 'neoliberalism', the Labour Party reorganised the country in ways all of us are still living with.

In both cases, Labour has set the beat and National have then solidified and deepened the changes. Through this steady, cyclical process our own major parties of movement and order have negotiated the twentieth century and beyond.

But does this analysis really hold? As a simplistic description of the dance between two major parties it is near enough for our purposes. With over a



century of this process behind us, though, we would do better to see this dance as order itself. The appearance of opposition, competition, difference without any content of significance. Let us take either party and ask: given carte blanche to enact their political and economic programme where does power sit? It stays precisely where it has always been, with the state—its laws, courts, politicians, and with capital—with the individuals and boards, shareholders and lobbyists, captains of industry and diffuse trusts, and banks. Order is maintained now not through the conservative tendency of one party, but through the left/right/left/right/hoof beat of both. Perhaps a hoof is not the best imagery, as even a pack horse has some spirit too—that thumping is instead the metallic thud of the machine.

The alternatives?

Now we get to the well-trod arguments of what to do instead. If these two major parties are moribund, lacking any character beyond that of the machinations of capital, what are we to do? Let's quickly look at some of the answers.

My anarchist friends have had an answer for a very long time now: don't vote, absolute abstention from the electoral process as fundamentally moribund. Of course, that is not their whole answer. There is power in community, in the streets, in organising directly in the workplace to exercise power where a worker has it most. A fine enough answer—what partisan of the workers movement who believes that the working class must take power would really oppose any of these things? Moreover, it does have the appearance of some class independence—we do not accept the legitimacy of elections and as such abstain from them. The trouble is there is indeed power in the streets (the

police), in the community (landlords), and in the workplace (employment law and the threat of punishment should you breach them). Anarchism does not remove itself from social reality, and aspects of social reality are determined by the outcome of elections whether one participates in them or not. To put it another way, the anarchist answer is to refuse the question.

Vote for the Greens? On the spectrum of left-to-right most would accept the Greens as 'more left' than Labour, and they're certainly more strident with questions of social progressivism. They appear more interested in change, both faster and more significant. Some of them even used to be anarchists, apparently. In an MMP environment a vote for the Greens does, to the extent that this is a meaningful metric, result in a 'more left' government—or a more left opposition. What it does not do, and seemingly never will, is provide an alternative to the machine. Consider the 2020 election. For the first time, and perhaps the only time it is likely to happen, the Labour Party could govern alone. The Greens, that party of terribly radical former activists with CVs well adorned with identity markers—proving their individuality and truly representative nature—chose not to be across the benches to hold one wing of the party of order to account. It is unlikely they'll ever have the opportunity to do so with such low stakes again (the Labour Government still would have been in power, so they wouldn't even be smeared as 'wreckers'). As such, their independence is skin deep only. Whether or not what they champion is working class politics (and I do not believe it is), they are currently an appendage of Labour. They will assist Labour with making whatever change seems necessary to leave power precisely where it is, and National will eventually win an election and consolidate

**RETAIN THE KEY TO
PROSPERITY
SAVAGE
GOVERNMENT.
VOTE LABOUR.**
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this new state of affairs—same as the old state of affairs, with a human face.

We are thinking about this all wrong

Perhaps the title for this subsection is unfair. After all, I am writing it. I am, as Alan Moore has put it, using words to conjure thoughts and images in your head—casting a spell, in a sense. Perhaps you were thinking about this much more clearly and it is my writing that has brought you down this cul-de-sac.

Let us recalibrate. Perhaps the question of who to vote for, or whether to vote at all, is basically immaterial. If the machine operates as I have described here, it is unlikely that the impact of voting (or not, for that matter) is very important. I'm sorry to say that if you are looking for an answer about who to vote for, or whether to bother at all, you won't find it here.

Socialists, as I understand it, aim to establish a state of affairs where working people come to power at all levels of society and set about reorganising it. This is not an immediately attainable goal, which can be deeply frustrating, but it calls on socialists to force themselves to think much more long term than an electoral cycle. So while I am not imploring you to vote (or not), I think it would be mistaken to present a socialist answer to the electoral question this year with the options in front of us. Do as you please in October, now we can turn to the real question.

Party, Programme, Independence, and Opposition

I understand many socialists may be satisfied with the call to focus our energy elsewhere, to ignore elections, to effectively

agree with the anarchists whether we are Marxists or socialists of some other stripe entirely. My assessment of electoral politics as the theatrical form that allows for the machine to continue unabated is not, however, an injunction to not give a shit about any of this. To quote a friend of over a decade, in an article that was sadly never published:

This is, unfortunately, the House of Parliament—where ugly and infinitely vulgar MPs's fat arses are arraigned for hours on end, in disgusting and antiquated rituals of formal 'debate'. But all the same, their debates become Law. The capitalist class is not uninterested in the power of this institution. In fact it invests enormous amounts into it through its parties and members. 'How embarrassing!' says the anti-Parliamentary socialist of today. For the real power resides in ad hoc and ideologically confused anti-fascist rallies at the steps of Parliament, wrapped in decolonial vomit, that climax in a nice political speech against racism from the Greens.'

So now we delve into a great heresy, one that may leave me hammering this article to the doors of a cathedral all alone. I do not reject the parliamentary road to power. In fact, I believe precisely what is needed for our movement is an independent party with a programme—one neither limp and conciliatory, nor utopian and impossibilist—that can intervene at the level of high politics while continuing to contribute to the enormous amount of work required to build working class power at every other level society.

Party—we all know what this means, or perhaps not, but in the oldest usage the word 'party' was not even offensive to the anarchists. A collective of people

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VOTE LABOUR AND
NO MORE WAR**

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FOR LABOUR PARTY
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Never Again!

VOTE LABOUR
AND NO MORE WAR

MILNER
P. 1525
1918

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working towards a similar political goal—in a sense we already have something like this in the Federation, if much too small to be influential, and perhaps with goals too vaguely defined. Nevertheless, to be disinterested in what is referred to as ‘high politics’ and retreat purely to the workplace and community ignores, as I’ve alluded to earlier, the way that the exercise of power through high politics influences the workplace and the community.

Programme—A party is an empty vessel without one, and there are many to draw from. *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848 was, in a way, a programme for a party that didn’t exist. Contrarily, *The Erfurt Programme* of 1891 was the articulation of a very large and serious party, and its elaboration in Kautsky’s *The Class Struggle* (1892) laid the basis for what would become orthodox Marxism for some decades. Influential in many small (though declining) sects now, Trotsky’s *Transitional Programme* of 1938, or Bordiga’s *Lyon’s Theses* (1926), all take it as necessary for any political organisation of the working class to have some specifically articulated goals.

The content of each of these programmes vary greatly. If you talk to some of the more paranoid citizens of our society they often note how many planks of the Communist Manifesto have been enacted by our own governments. Marx and Engels themselves admitted not long after its publication that the platform articulated in the manifesto was out of date. Kautsky’s intervention, enormously aided and informed by Engels, sought to influence the Second International—made up of socialist parties from many nations and encompassing millions of members and supporters in total. Bordiga, an interesting Italian Marxist somewhat lost to history in the English speaking world, was one of the few to call Stalin the gravedigger

of the revolution to his face. Sometimes described as ‘more Leninist than Lenin’, Amadeo Bordiga helped write the Terms of Membership to the Communist International, and his Lyon’s Theses were in part an attempt to clarify and rearticulate a genuine Marxist position in the face of Comintern Stalinisation. Bordiga was so committed to the programme as central to any Marxist organisation that he’d be quite disgusted at my willingness to write about him as an individual at all. The transitional programme, to some degree or another, has basically been absorbed into revolutionary socialist assumptions for decades now—our friends in Socialist Aotearoa, the International Socialist Organisation, Fightback, Redline, and the International Bolshevik Tendency all owe a great deal of their consideration of programme and political activity to this 1938 document.

While the content of these programmes vary greatly, what they have in common is important: they are of their time. The context in which they are written, the purpose of their articulation at all, is enormously influential.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

This quote from Marx is very popular, but the emphasis placed upon aspects of it has been misleading. In the socialist left today, for example, it is assumed that ‘transmitted from the past’ is so important that any new programme must build upon the previous programmes of our history. Considering the near total disintegration of Marxist politics in the West this seems so optimistic as to veer into delusion.



Instead the emphasis must be made that what we do is not in circumstances under which we would prefer—and today, in New Zealand, that may mean confronting the very real possibility that a revolutionary programme, inherited from Marx via Trotsky or whomever else is entirely inappropriate to our conditions.

What, then, are our conditions? We exist in a country that is small in population though not particularly small in land-mass. We are geographically isolated, and while generalised globalisation of production has reduced the impact of ‘time’ on the flows of capital, it is apparent that in any significant crisis we may be overlooked as an insignificant market not worth catering to as far as supply chain magnates are concerned ;consider, for example, the number of container ships that delayed visiting New Zealand for great lengths of time during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Working class people in this country are disempowered on multiple levels—not only do we lack significant ability to determine the state of affairs at our workplaces, the fact that New Zealand never truly industrialised and was instead kept as a farm for the British motherland means that, in the contemporary world economy, we have retreated into a collection of economic cul-de-sacs which we seem unable to escape. This country runs on; 1) primary industry which owes very little to ‘value added’ by labour, preferring to export raw or near-raw products, 2) the ‘FIRE’ (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate) economy as detailed by Jane Kelsey—an industry that is excellent at extracting profit without ever increasing the total amount of useful goods on the planet, and 3) service work—whether that be in tourism or more localised. None of these industries provide the opportunity for workers within them to exercise their power particularly well. This does not mean that small scale industrial activity is impossible, or not beneficial. It does mean, however, that should any mass movement of the working class seek to take the reins of production under their own control and redirect them towards pro-human (rather than pro-capital) ends, they would find themselves directing smoke and mirrors—we would not want for dairy or unprocessed pine logs, I suppose.

With this in mind, my thinking on the question of a political programme for a socialist (or similar) party to take would have to consider a serious reorganisation of the national economy. While socialism ‘in one country’ is untenable for both geopolitical and resource related reasons, the ability to have some aspects of economic sovereignty with which to build a new way of doing things is paramount. The post-colonial experience of Africa and elsewhere is a testament to this fact, as

**TED HOWARD—
SOCIALIST MP FOR
CHRISTCHURCH
SOUTH 1919-1939**

CREDIT:
STANLEY
POLKINGHORNE
ANDREW

there is no way to build any sort of society when your economy is dependent upon an international system that would prefer that you fail. As such, while the democratisation and elevation of workers power throughout the economy would be similar to a great deal of socialist programmes, I believe the immediate task of a pro-working class programme in this country would be more Wolfgang Rosenberg than Rosa Luxemburg. It is not that we need to re-shore industry in order to have workers in positions of power within the economy, more that we need to establish some of these industries at all in a country which has been somewhat shielded from ever having to do so due to political and economic relationships with our colonial betters. This will take significant state direction which no party today has the forethought or inclination to consider.

Radical phrases and demands may be cathartic, but they do not really contest power. A mass democratic party, armed with a programme that seeks to suppress the needs of the market in the interest of working-class power—even if that programme seems quite moderate to many of those currently on the far left—will be rightly treated as significantly more of a threat than any sloganeering.

Independence—For a party to be independent it needs to be largely self-reliant. Learning from the best periods of our history is informative here. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Social Democratic Parties (as they were called at the time) were not merely electoral vehicles but were instead social and civic organisations of a scale hard to imagine today. The SPD in Germany, for whom Kautsky elucidated the programme I mentioned earlier, had under its auspices an enormous variety of social clubs, sports teams, vocational organisations, and so on. While recreating this in its entirety is unlikely, due to the

changes in the capitalist state since this time, ordinary civil society, while largely depoliticised, is happy enough to fill in many gaps for working class people which used to be ignored—there is no need for a workers' party to organise workers' sports teams for example when access to these has become much easier, nor is leisure a case of 'do it yourself' as capitalism finds it quite lucrative to sell entertainment even to the working class. Nevertheless, there are still many ways in which ordinary working people are not served by the current system in questions of community, connection, education, and conviviality. As austerity knocks at our door, and economic downturn appears likely, the atrophying of what remains of civil society will no doubt accelerate. By being well positioned to intervene in these periods of decay and provide independent forms of social organisation, a party may have a dynamic and deeply rooted life of its own which will in turn facilitate an independence from the 'good graces' of those already in power. While social reality is often codified and reflected by the state and the law, it is not over-determined by it. With an ecosystem of workers organisations any party or labour movement worth a damn would be able to weather the possibility of being made 'illegal' at worst, persona non grata at least, without collapsing entirely by being embedded in and improving the lives of working people.

Opposition—Perhaps the hardest sell of all of this is the notion of opposition. Socialists of any stripe—be they reformist or revolutionary, anarchist or otherwise, understand that we are deeply opposed to the way things are now. We do not imagine we can inherit all aspects of this society and simply transform them to serve pro-social, human ends. They have been created and developed over centuries to serve the interests of capital and bureaucracy, and

any intervention to undo this trend will be met with extraordinarily fierce resistance by the forces of order. Moreover, partial victories and piecemeal attempts to move the dial in the direction of workers power are unlikely to be lasting, or worse, will be integrated into a new bureaucratic and capitalistic set of societal norms. As such, any party which wishes to have something resembling class independence in the electoral sphere will have to understand itself as a part of extreme opposition until such time that conditions are appropriate and the ability to enact a programme of significant' perhaps even 'revolutionary', changes is possible. In the old, orthodox parlance these were considered the factors necessary for enacting a Minimum Programme. What this would mean for successful electoral candidates, or a party which has representation at the highest levels of government, is a topic for further discussion and may not be identical at local or national levels. Nonetheless, this does necessitate educating supporters and members of any such project towards a deep and long-term way of thinking about our political project.

The state as it currently exists is characterised by inertia in the form of consent-building media, as well as civil servant bureaucrats who are tasked with maintaining the status quo and handing a great deal of real power to technocrats. This is inertia in the sense of uniform motion, rather than being absolutely frozen in place—the liberal, ostensibly democratic state tends towards consistency. The ability of a radically democratic, working-class movement to actually replace these instruments of class rule will need significant organisation long before a party wins an election. Furthermore, any context under which a class party may be in a position to make serious gains would

likely be in conditions of general de-legitimisation of the existing order.

I have seen sentiments of this sort described as *revolutionary patience*. That seems fitting advice for those of us in the Federation of Socialist Societies. Merely a few years into our project, and already numbering among the larger groups of recent decades, we would do well to continue to 'keep our powder dry'. Let us consider what we may be able to do, and pursue an understanding of, and engagement with, social reality that may help us build the sorts of class organisation needed this century. I believe that includes an electoral party, but whatever we build should be suitable for our current situation, while having the institutional capacity to respond to changes in the balance of forces. To build an organisation designed for circumstances we are not in may as well be a socialist version of 'The Secret'—assuming the *law of attraction* will deliver us a situation in which we can live out our imagined role.

It may be that circumstances change in ways unforeseen by this document, and I don't want to preclude the possibility that some enormous change in our society would see an argument for factionalism within the extant left. If that eventuates, I believe the principles here will still be relevant and help guide our thinking.

Vote if you want to, or not, but let's get on with discussing what actually needs to be done.



HARRY ROBSON

The Absence of Public Ownership and Planning is Holding Back Our Country

WHATEVER
HAPPENED TO OUR
DREAM

CREDIT:
ERIC HEATH

New Zealand is caught in the gyre of many crises, all of which reflect the inability of 'free' markets to provide for the needs of either individuals or society as a whole. This malaise hangs over not just New Zealand, but the wider Western world. Meanwhile the oft quoted adage 'it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism' has become a bromide for sections of the left caught in a feedback loop of defeatism, economic illiteracy, and post-materialism.

Contrary to this is our own history: New Zealand's record of being the most radically interventionist social democracy in the post-war period. By rediscovering

our own past, we can reclaim the future; what a society not captured by market logic looked like, how the state can manage the economy as a whole for the benefit of many, and what measures can develop the basis of a socialist alternative—the way out.

Using (now) heterodox political economy, this piece will examine the economic history of New Zealand, current trends in economic thinking, and the vital role public ownership and planning has to play in addressing our country's structural problems.

The failure of “free markets”

To those who believe the purpose of economic policy should be the achievement of positive social outcomes, as opposed to a focus on economics that emphasises the maximum profitability of firms, collective democratic planning of production—what could also be known as indicative planning or national economic planning—is the means by which the state coordinates economic activity in ‘the national interest.’

The national interest could be considered the interests of the collective as a whole; the principles, practices, and greater purposes that benefit us all and supersede the wants of any particular element. As Michael Joseph Savage once said, ‘I do not think it is in any use talking about national wealth unless we can use it for national purposes.’

Since wealth and resources are generated by the collaborative labour of all in society, the use of this wealth must be within rational collectivist parameters; i.e., ‘national purposes.’ Some of these include—

- social welfare: the ability for all individuals and families to meet their immediate and qualitative needs, such

as nutrition, clothing, leisure, recreation etc.

- public investment and Government-directed economic development to ensure—
 - economic security for all workers
 - greater self-sufficiency on a national economic level, especially so as to protect against external shocks.
 - an economy with a material base in domestic production and essential services, as opposed to rentier or speculative economic activity that yields ‘profit’ without contributing to the total provision of goods.
 - real income increases and rising living standards, brought about by aggregate demand being absorbed by domestically produced goods.
 - social security: the minimising of out-of-pocket costs incurred by disability, illness or injury through a universal, free at the point of use health and care system
 - promotion, conservation, and expansion of the commons so as to remove the economic bar on educational attainment, social mobility, and participation in public life.

In opposition to national purposes lies capital. In the age of shareholder capitalism, private enterprise has neither the inclination nor the social conscience to address the structural rot that has steadily eroded any social good. A quote from Bruce Jesson’s *Only Their Purpose is Mad* (1999) illustrates this point:

A void has opened up in New Zealand, as a consequence of the [free] market transformation of the last fourteen years, in which things that the market cannot provide simply do not occur. Nowhere is this more evident than in Auckland. The theory underlying the

*local government reforms was that regulation and policy was the role of public bodies; whereas the provision of services was the role of the private sector [public-private partnerships]. This division of labour doesn't work in practice, however, because the initiative and drive for a project have to come from the providers not the regulators. **There are all sorts of projects which might be of great public benefit, but in which the private sector providers have no great interest or incentive.** Public transport is one of the most disagreeable features of life in Auckland ... There are various reasons for this ... it is virtually impossible to bring a region-wide view to [these] regional problems [because] ... these days ... New Zealand has a privatised rail company, Tranz Rail, and Auckland now has a privatised bus service owned by Stagecoach. Neither has any reason to work with each other or anyone else on an overall solution for Auckland's public transport problems.*

A 'hands-off' economic approach by governments since the 1980s has failed to address this 'void'; the chronic underinvestment and underdevelopment in our country brought about free market and monetarist policy. Public policy in the neoliberal political economy favours regulatory measures—preventing harm or hazard—over state interventionism. There is an inherent 'negativity' to this type of policy-making. The role of Government diminishes. Material conditions, and the social relations that ensue, are not subject to democratic forces, only market ones. The Government does not build the society the public wants. It simply exists to blunt the worst excesses of market behaviour,

while administering an ever-burgeoning bureaucracy of 'bullshit jobs.'

A social democratic reformist government would need to expand the instruments it has at its disposal. The most direct vehicle for planning is public ownership. 'The commanding heights of the economy' in Marxian and left-wing economics refers to those sections of the economy that have to be brought under democratic, collective control in order to begin any kind of significant transformation of the economy: critical infrastructure; a large firm in a consolidated market; natural resources; an industry of strategic importance, for instance.

The government can then use its publicly owned and controlled enterprises to achieve 'public-spirited ideals' that transcend the conservative motives of the business community; namely, the short-termist obsession with maximising margins.

A case example: the banking industry and the housing market

The banking sector is one such industry of strategic importance. Since the mid-to-late 1990s the Australian-owned 'Big Four', ANZ, ASB, BNZ, and Westpac, have pursued lending practices that have hurt not helped the national interest. Brian Gaynor provides an account of this (Jesson, 1999):

The share market crash [of 1987] has had an enduring impact on a number of important areas: New Zealand companies were in no position to buy Government assets in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

*Consequently a large number of these assets were bought by offshore interests ... Private investors have lost interest in the share market and have switched to residential housing ... The banks have become particularly conservative and now prefer to fund the housing and department markets. **This has led to a residential boom which may haunt the banks in the years ahead;** and 'the business and investment community' has become cautious and conservative. Company directors and executives are now more adept at downsizing—cutting costs and reducing debt—than expanding.*

Independent economist Cameron Bagrie has commented on 'the market fixation with making money in a six-to-twelve month window' that is 'actually holding the economy back' due to a failure to take on risk, including by not investing in productive sectors of the economy.

A quarter of a century later and the market has not changed its behaviour, leading to a tremendous misallocation of capital that could have been utilised to develop infrastructure and secondary industries. Meanwhile, a major housing crisis has developed as a result of steep asset price inflation—the housing market boom the Big Four decided to cultivate thirty or so years ago. In 2022, over 60% of all bank lending went towards housing. Only 9% of all bank lending came from New Zealand-owned banks, with KiwiBank being the predominant lender. Significantly more democratic and governmental pressure can be applied on firms that are locally owned, whereas international capital can only be said to be invested in, and accountable to, the situation in a given country to the degree that the market of that country remains profitable to them.

The Council of Trade Unions (CTU) has proposed the government create a national investment bank with the aim to invest in projects, particularly along national development lines, that privately owned banks are too conservative and short-termist to consider; the Scottish National Investment Bank being the inspiration. Unfortunately, the experiment of Kiwibank has shown that a supplementary state-owned enterprise to the market is not enough to achieve fundamental or significant change. The problem with a supplementary solution is that it accepts the state of market behaviour, and the consequences of neoliberalism, then tries to accomplish something different atop broken foundations. The CTU proposal is an amelioration, not an undoing, of economic liberalism. To truly shape the direction of output and capital allocation in a given sector, the government must own and control a major player.

Of course, the public sector once owned four commercial banks: Bank of New Zealand, the Post Office Savings Bank, the Development Finance Corporation, and Rural Banking. These institutions were not merely backstops, but interventionist instruments; a means to translate public policy into market activity through steering the flow of capital and resources towards projects and development commensurate with what the public wanted, and what the country needed.

...legislative measures [were needed] to handle the economy as a whole, whereas formerly the Government had confined itself to altering wages, taxation, and the level of public works ... a central bank which might give the Government freedom from control by bankers and also direct the hitherto uncontrolled private banking system ...



**STATE HOUSING
UNDER
CONSTRUCTION
IN PETONE,
WELLINGTON**

CREDIT:
WELLINGTON
EVENING POST

The setting up of the Reserve Bank [in 1934] was necessary for any further social and economic development. Seddon [in the 1890s] had refused to make the Bank of New Zealand an instrument of public policy and by this refusal New Zealand, for nearly 40 years, had endured some needless stagnation and, through the working of the commercial banking system, had suffered more heavily than it need have ...

The Labour Government's philosophy that every New Zealander had a right to decent housing ... could not have been done if the Reserve Bank had not existed to carry out government policy ... From 1936 onwards the provision of houses by the state, usually on some sort of planned development, has been part of New Zealand's social welfare. Only

the Government, with the Reserve Bank, could have provided what the people clearly wanted. (Sutch, 1969)

The forty years of stagnation prior to the sweeping economic interventions introduced in the 1930s has an unmistakable parallel to the three decades of stagnation, missed opportunities and managed decline that has once again characterised New Zealand since the conclusion of the Rogernomics-Ruthanasia reforms of the 1980s & 90s.

Just as the old economic liberalism of the 19th and early 20th century, known as laissez-faire, failed to meet the collective and individual needs of ordinary peoples, today's neoliberalism (new economic liberalism; new laissez-faire) has resulted in a litany of avoidable catastrophes brought on by the moral hazard of unfettered capitalism.

Contrast the current free market approach to the supply of housing—profligate lending by the Big Four, operating with no regard for anything other than the strength of their margins, which has produced negative externalities and widened the wealth gap—with the state interventionist approach shared by National and Labour in the post-war period (Bryan Bruce, 2021):

There was a time when banking was heavily regulated in our country. Most people put their money in the government owned and controlled Post Office Savings Bank [POSB] and the profits were distributed back to the people through other government agencies such as the State Advances Corporation which dominated the mortgage market and thereby controlled house prices and housing development. It was all part of that welfare state post-war thinking about how to build a fairer more equitable nation. [POSB] profits funded state institutions like the State Advances Corporation that lent mortgage money at 3% for 40 years to first home buyers. So we saved in our own bank to lend to our fellow Kiwis. And because of what was in effect a lease-to-buy scheme many thousands of ordinary New Zealanders were able to get a place to call home and achieve security of tenure.

The lamentable state of the housing market is an indictment of economic ideologies that reject or want to minimise the role of the state in planning and developing important areas of social and economic life. The proposition that planning doesn't work and free markets better allocate resources is demonstrably false,

and New Zealand's historical and present experience is a testament to that.

A second case example: the forestry industry

We can look beyond banking and housing to make the case that blind enthusiasm for the free market conflicts with the common good. The North Island floods have recently drawn attention to the practices of owners in the forestry industry.

Forestry slash, the scrap timber, branches and offcuts left behind when pine plantations are harvested, has recently received press coverage for its role in the destruction wrought by Cyclone Gabrielle. According to reporting by Tony Wall of the *Sunday-Star Times* (19 February 2023), the irresponsible and sometimes illegal practices regarding the management of slash by land owners (including local Iwi) contributed to 'further flooding, damage to property and infrastructure, injury and death' during the floods because the slash was swept away by heavy rain into swollen rivers, which in turn became larger and more dangerous. Slash that is swept into rivers also makes future flooding more likely as 'more and more height is added to the riverbed [by slash turned into sediment], [so] it takes less and less water for it to come over its banks' (Wall, 2023).

A major bridge in Tairāwhiti was destroyed by slash:

Piles of dead wood had swept down from pine forests and combined with flood waters to choke the river and the bridge crumbled under the pressure. Te Hau-Ward is the Civil Defence coordinator for Tokomaru Bay and says the bridge would still be intact if not for all the wood.

The damage is so severe the town is now completely isolated from the rest of the country and helicopters are still the only way to get people and supplies in or out. "We are feeling isolated and afraid," she says. "It's going to take years to recover."
(Madden-Smith, 2023)

What's of relevance here is that many of these forests used for logging were once part of the land owned by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS), which was sold off during the 1980s and 1990s despite widespread public opposition. In 1988, 52% of the forestry sector was state-owned, versus 7% in 1998 (M. Clarke, 2000). The NZFS, in its heyday, was 'the largest and dominant player in the forestry sector, [it] provided leadership and vision for the sector and had great influence over the policies and strategies that determined the direction the development of the sector took' (O'Loughlin).

It also served both commercial and social functions: John Patterson, a former civil servant, recalls that 'the Forest Service was taking people who couldn't get a job. You're better planting trees than sitting on the dole' (Matthews, 2017).

The programme of Rogernomics hit rural New Zealand hard; restructuring of the public sector, and the removal of subsidies and rural services, had a major impact on the regions (Trafford). In the 1980s, for 'smaller [forestry] towns like Tuatapere unemployment was at around 80 per cent' (Matthews, 2017). The regions suffered greatly as a result of what were billed as 'reforms' by the technocrats in Wellington. In the absence of public ownership, state intervention, and comprehensive rural services, these regions remain in steep economic and demographic decline.

The now privately-owned forestry sector has been the subject of multiple

controversies in addition to the slash scandal (now the subject of a government inquiry); it is one of the deadliest industries in New Zealand, and tensions are rising with local communities over the ecological impact of its business practices.

To add insult to injury, the great majority of the harvest is sent offshore, even though there is strong (and necessary) domestic demand for those materials. Some of these forestry products are then re-imported as value-added goods or finished goods—an absolute absurdity; however, the exact numbers on this aren't known because the Ministry of Primary Industries does not distinguish between imports and reimports in its records. The total value of solid timber imports has grown from NZ\$88 million in 1993 to NZ \$531 million in 2015 (May, 2015). Reliance on imports means 'New Zealand consumers have transferred their environmental footprint off-shore by purchasing forest products imported [or reimported] from overseas' (Ibid).

Due to this reliance on imports, cash flow and commercial activity is taken out of regional economies because owners have prioritised exporting raw materials at the expense of manufacturing and value-added processes; which benefits no one other than the 'forestry owners—many of whom are not New Zealanders but foreign corporations that have invested in land here' (Craymer, 2021). This problem is partly exacerbated by the lack of support for domestic producers from successive neoliberal New Zealand Governments that have failed to implement development-friendly policies such as procurement, protectionism, or export restrictions.

Here we see the difference between public ownership and private enterprise: a natural resource once used through its public ownership to achieve an 'outstanding record' in land management and

development (O’Loughlin); now in the hands of foreign and private ownership, that same industry has become a hazard to its communities, a well of labour exploitation, and a regressive force on economic development.

The absence of state intervention, public ownership, and public bodies to coordinate economic strategy has only led to outcomes that have made New Zealand a less developed, less productive, less secure, and less stable society. Free market economics has been an abject social failure. Even in the doldrums of Muldoonism there still retained some positive social outcomes such as full employment, a healthy manufacturing base, and universal social welfare. If the problems of the ‘hands-on’ interventionist economic model from the 1930s to the 1970s were a problem of unbridled executive power, then the problems of the neoliberal political economy (1980s—present) are of unbridled market behaviour.

Profit to be the servant, not the master—public ownership and planning to be the directing force

Profit must become the servant of socially planned development, not the master.
(Wolfgang Rosenberg)

The challenge now for the left is to provide a schematic of an alternative economic model. New Zealand needs to recover the legal and economic architecture that equipped the Government with an array of instruments to address different macroeconomic problems simultaneously,

to ‘handle the economy as a whole’, as opposed to ad hoc incrementalism.

Neoliberalism produced a fundamental paradigm shift in how resources and wealth should be allocated or distributed. Put simply, the spirit of neoliberalism is that ‘market forces’—once unshackled by stultifying government intervention—will determine what has value and what doesn’t; therefore, ‘naturally’ achieving equilibrium and efficiency in the economy and in wider society, for what doesn’t have value according to ‘the markets’—and only they are ‘objective’—will be marginalised or done away with entirely. This is what’s meant when references are made to this, that, and the other being ‘neoliberalised’; university education, for instance. At bottom neoliberalism is the same economic ideology as that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the time of the robber barons, as it believes in the unfettered or deregulated freedom of action of the propertied individuals and groups in society.

By contrast, the post-war economy could be described as Dirigist. Dirigisme is the state exercising a protective, directive influence over the economy through a process which the New Zealand Planning Council says is ‘a mixture of market forces and Government direction and control’. Three questions make up the fundamentals of structural reform: who should produce, what is to be produced, and how should they produce it? (*Planning Perspectives*, 1978). In this Dirigiste structuring of the economy, the balance of forces lay with administrative mechanisms over commercial ones. One such example was import licensing, the requirement that importers hold an import licence, which was used to limit the number of imports and so protect and promote domestic production.

On universal import licensing, a report from a National Development Conference stated:

Because it does not rely on the market mechanism to achieve results, import licensing represents a most useful form of intervention where the authorities consider the market attaches insufficient significance to the relative social and political costs and benefits of a particular enterprise. (1969; Rosenberg, 1993)

What's of note is that National Development Conferences were made up of prominent business interests, secondary industries predominantly. The advocacy of an administrative mechanism over market forces is remarkable considering today's neoliberal attitudes that the unbridled market alone can provide for the wealth and welfare of the country. Rational economic policy does not stem from the self-serving economic conservatism of corporate New Zealand, but in the sober-minded consideration of how to channel the productive—and disruptive—forces of a market economy into broader social ends.

A major innovation for social democratic parties would be to shift emphasis from the distribution of resources to their production. Until this happens, we are stuck in the era between Occupy and 2016, a period where the emphasis was on expropriating the 1%—it correctly presupposed the populist indignation at financial elites, but failed to congeal into anything that could have triggered a paradigm shift. The populist conservatism of America First, on the other hand, has become more reified in politico-economic thinking. Its emphasis on reshoring production has yielded more significant buy-in from policymakers and the Joe Average public alike, contributing to a shift in the Overton window towards

economic nationalism, as signified by the CHIPS Act signed into law by President Biden.

Democratic oversight of production, alongside restoring the productive base of the economy, and achieving full employment must be central objectives of the economic left. Economically left-wing positions need not alienate small-c conservatives either. As Dr Stephen Watkins of Lancashire wrote in a letter to the New Statesman:

In 1962 I was a conservative. I believed privilege could only be justified by service, high taxes on very high incomes were necessary to prevent an entrepreneurial economy becoming a rentier economy, and Keynesian growth would finance public service improvements and a welfare state that steadily reduced inequality. I was suspicious of ideologically driven, large-scale change. These were the mainstream policies of the Macmillan government at the time. In 60 years I have moved from centre right to hard left without changing my opinions.

The Great Inflation Debate raises the importance of the public sphere

Public ownership has an important role to play in attaining and maintaining price stability. Devika Dutt, a fellow at the University of Southern California's economics department, argues that the underlying import dependency in Western economies must be addressed.

By developing economic self-sufficiency through investing in domestic supply chains—agricultural and energy output

among other things—the long-term inflation risk will be reduced (Dutt, 2022).

Citing Dutt, Michael Roberts, a Marxist economist, writes that the alternative to monetarism lies in public investment (which is the process by which the state invests in particular assets, whether through central or local governments or through publicly owned industries or corporations):

There is an alternative to monetary or wage restraint, these policy proposals of the mainstream, acting in the interests of bankers and corporations to preserve profitability. It is to boost investment and production through public investment. That would solve the supply shock. But sufficient public investment to do that would require significant control of the major sectors of the economy, particularly energy and agriculture; and coordinated action ...
(Roberts, 2022)

As countries like China move to decouple from the West in support of their own strategic objectives, the neoliberal political economy of churn—which requires an unrelenting stream of cheap commodities and finished goods from the Global South—looks increasingly unviable. Accordingly, the pivot to reindustrialisation has already begun in the West, underscoring the point that even if they publicly claim that inflation is a demand problem, the realities of structural inflation are not missed by some of our leaders.

Domestically, New Zealand faces similar challenges in price stability. As with other deindustrialised Western countries, these challenges fundamentally stem from underdevelopment of domestic supply chains. Despite a weakening in demand, construction costs were soaring at record

levels last year, and shortages of timber and plasterboard played a central role. Fletcher Building's role in this fiasco has been covered in the media; and timber shortages are expected to last well into 2023. In 2021, Stuff reported on the impact of free trade on the sector's ability to meet domestic consumption:

It's not just trees but also the capacity to turn the logs into structural timber. New Zealand has seen a number of processing plant closures and the sector has seen a decade of underinvestment. Tava Olsen says huge capital would be needed to build new plants and boost the sector. "It's not impossible, but you need the will to do it," she says. David Turner, executive director at Sequal Lumber NZ, says his Kawerau-based business has been able to grow significantly over the last eight years and is still only satisfying half of the demand. But Chinese demand for raw logs is his number one impediment. "We don't need to be subsidised, We don't need help. We just need fairness," he says.
(Craymer 2021)

This was echoed by other manufacturers:

The Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association's Chief Executive, Jon Tanner says Chinese log buyers were going to what he called extraordinary lengths to buy up logs and he is blaming this for the short supply of sawn timber revealed this week when Carter Holt Harvey cut supply to some of its regular customers, ITM, Bunnings and Mitre 10.
(Stevenson, 2021)

In the absence of any active role by the state, New Zealand will remain more or

less in a regressive 19th century economic structure, at the mercy of external shocks and depending on the goodwill of great powers—‘our colonial betterers,’ as Sutch put it. Institutions like the Ministry of Works will have to play a central role in any national development undertaken by a reform-minded, economically nationalist government. Discussing the structural benefits of restoring the MoW, Max Harris points out that:

A single entity [the MoW] can buy supplies in bulk and employ at scale quickly ... I think a more active role through the supply chain allows more opportunities for coordination: on material use (ensuring materials are sustainable), employment standards & training, accessibility, etc. Also allows closer scrutiny and monitoring and follow-through. We need an organisation that builds national operational capability and capacity to deliver projects.

Economic planning would not be a new phenomenon for New Zealand

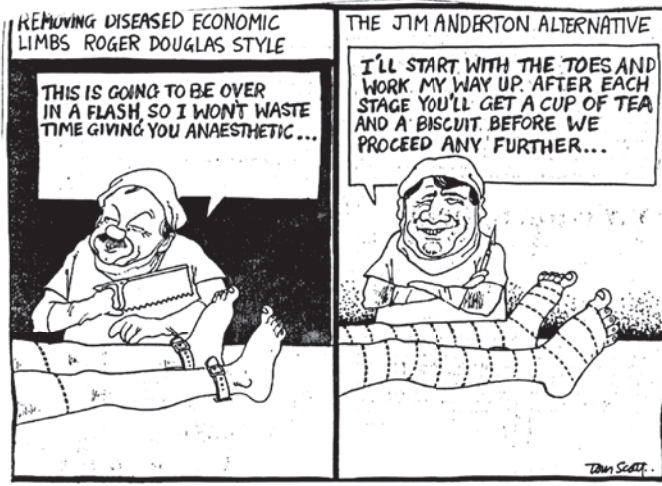
Previous attempts at economic planning were consultative and had a mixed record. Organisational design and industry compliance posed the most significant hurdles. Learning from our previous record of planning can help avoid similar failures. Harry Lake, National Party Finance Minister, 1960–67, provides a description of consultative economic planning:

In the more developed western countries, indicative economic planning is today assuming an increasingly

important role ... it is based on the proposition that everyone has a vital interest in seeing that the growth of the national economy ... is ... balanced to ensure that the material, educational, and employment needs of an expanding population are met and the living standards for future generations improved. A prime object of indicative planning is to provide guidelines and targets ... The practicability and nature of these targets are determined by a process of consultation ... The Government can help to provide the necessary climate and incentives and to secure the most effective use of available resources, but it is up to an industry itself to attain the desired goals ... (1965; Rosenberg, 1993)

To carry out this purpose, National Development Conferences were held between the Government and industry. These planning exercises achieved the ‘creation of an extensive information base on the economy; the more systematic use of new techniques, notably economic modelling, for understanding the economy; and a broadening of the planning base to include social and environmental concerns as well as economic ones’ (Fischer). A National Development Council (NDC), supported by a ‘network of individual sector councils,’ assisted this purpose.

However, the NDC and its conferences encountered several issues. The most basic problem was the volume of information and reports produced by the multitude of sector councils, which made cohesive planning less efficient. Further problems arose from a lack of resolute action: ‘weak links’ between the outcomes of planning initiatives and Government decision making, contributing to ‘planning in a vacuum’; a failure to adequately monitor progress



towards the targets that had been set and reappraise policies based on results; and vested interests that could inhibit free and frank discussion (Fischer).

The machinery needed to reflect the complexity of the economic and social affairs it was handling was lacking. Instead, the system of sector councils—overseen by the National Development Council—amounted to a patchwork quilt of self-directed activity sponsored by the Government. Since Ministers and officials lacked the resources and time to attend to planning regularly, collective planning was not harnessed by the state as effectively as it could have been. Nonetheless, conferences were valuable in promoting and contributing to a culture of 'depth in development.'

The NDC was disestablished by Rowling, and replaced by the New Zealand Planning Council (NZPC) once Muldoon was back in office. Muldoon had also established its predecessor. Based on the recommendations of the 1976 Taskforce of Economic and Social Planning, a national planning council was introduced in 1977

as a central organisation acting under its own power to research, assess, discuss and recommend proposals and approaches.

Warren Freer, the Labour Minister of Trade and Industry (1972-75), spoke supportively of Muldoon establishing the NZPC, while emphasising pluralism:

The Labour party has always been a strong supporter of economic planning... If we are to have long-term planning, which I strongly subscribe to, it can best be achieved by bringing all the resources available within the economic, cultural, environmental and political sides of life into one group.
(1981; Fischer, 1981)

The bipartisan consensus on economic planning that existed during the post-war period is a testament to the heights from which the political economy of New Zealand fell. But it shows us that economic planning is not some exotic and impracticable endeavour. It is a useful, democratic mechanism to shape the development of our society and economy in the image of

THE JIM ANDERTON ALTERNATIVE

CREDIT:
TOM SCOTT

considerations greater than the narrow, short-termist goals of rentier capitalists.

Once more with feeling? And a bit more democracy

A reformist social democratic government could begin with reconstituting the New Zealand Planning Council, while aiming over time to build out the machinery of planning into the development network originally envisaged by Muldoon. By establishing the institutional framework to set, plan, and monitor progress towards economic and social objectives—national and regional—it would provide the platform and resourcing to, in contemporary terms, break the psycho-cultural control of *capitalist realism*.

It would be both a binding influence and also a conduit for discussion and exploration of what the parameters of society ought to be, unmolested by market norms and values. And it would promote consciousness that the externalities of the markets must be accounted for, and promote more long-termist thought on economic and social development. In essence, the exact opposite of 'the narrow financial perspective that currently dominates.' It would also have a more central role in public sector leadership, as a counterbalance to the economic conservatism of Treasury. Furthermore, any future planning should move from a consultative to a coordinative model—the latter containing a degree of binding authority.

It is an essential part of the process of nation-building ... that we seriously begin to set goals for our nation and ourselves. Any goals of a national or social character have to come from other sources. These goals might be

increased leisure, cultural enrichment, personal security, material possessions, education for its own sake, enhancement of the environment or whatever.

It would also inevitably restore the economic importance of the state ... An activist state has been the rule rather than the exception in New Zealand, even in the nineteenth century when the world was without borders and the New Zealand economy was more open than now.
(Jesson, 1999)

Yet, fundamentally, there was (and still remains) the problem of leaving development up to the private sector. Despite all this effort, which was voluntarist by nature, market forces—particularly from the finance sector, enabled by the gradual liberalisation of the 1970s—served to damage not enhance the national welfare and development of New Zealand. This culminated in the senseless, large-scale demolition of the productive base of the economy by Rogernomics, along with the widespread economic security it provided; and a redistribution of national wealth to unproductive sectors and a small proportion of the population.

The lesson is clear. Public investment, public ownership, and public control are integral to a decent society for working people.

New Zealand is a large country possessed of both incredible beauty and significant potential. Living memory provides the evidence of what the ingenuity and resourcefulness of New Zealanders can achieve as a whole when protectionist, democratic collectivist systems prevail over the individual prerogative to maximise one's own wealth irrespective of the social good, the national interest.

SIONAINN BYRNES

Why Socialism?

I became a socialist in the sense that I started to identify as a socialist in my mid-to-late twenties, but absent the actual term, I was raised according to core socialist values. Let me say that I don't really know one side of my family. Due to his upbringing, my father Greg distanced my siblings and I from the Byrneses. I think I was fifteen when I met my paternal grandmother. My paternal grandfather died before I was born. I say this because it goes some way to explain my identification with the Irish side of my family. My maternal grandfather Brian was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1938. The eldest of ten born to Catholic parents, Brian was predestined for the seminary or the gaol. In 1964, Brian emigrated (maybe absconded is the word) to Aotearoa/New Zealand. He didn't bring much in the way of belongings, but he had a lot of baggage. I won't go into detail, but suffice it to say that, for this man who is so well read, *Angela's*

Ashes is a book too far. Yet, safe amid his baggage, Brian brought to Aotearoa the convictions that people should have enough to eat and a place to live; that religious sectarianism, at least in the context of Northern Ireland and for all of its genuine hurt, is a bane to solidarity along class lines; that a fair future still behoves attention to past injustices; that education is power. My mother Siobhan inherited these convictions and stood for her own. At fifteen Siobhan was arrested (twice) for her opposition to the 1981 Springbok Tour. Greg will point out that he too was arrested during mine and my siblings' first protest against the Iraq War. In fact, my siblings and I were taken out of school to witness Greg defend himself against the charge of disorderly behaviour—a lesson of sorts. All of this is to say that I grew up in a family sympathetic to social justice if not socialism proper, but that needn't be so in order to be a socialist. Believe me, there are so many fine points on which members of my family and I disagree! In terms of my own beliefs, which I think have benefitted from my time in tertiary education, here are the basics:

- this planet has so much to give, but only so much. The capitalist mode of production, distribution, and consumption is suicidal;
- people deserve by virtue of their existence enough to eat, a place to live, an opportunity to learn, and all reasonable means to self-determination;
- life assumes work, and people should be prepared to work relative to their abilities and circumstances. Reproductive labour is work; not everyone can work all of the time; work is sometimes obligation, sometimes vocation, always meaningful; leisure isn't a luxury for the few;
- intergenerational connections to place are important, and so is free movement. Neither of these is without responsibility;
- people are generally good. They are idiosyncratic and often difficult, but people mostly want to live with others in peace.



JACK HAINES

Cuban Polyclinics: A Model for New Zealand?

ESCUELA
LATINOAMERICANA
DE MEDICINA

CREDIT:
ANDERSONT
DAVID APARICIO
MENDOZA

During a visit to a large GP practice I experienced a culture shock, both as a nurse suddenly experiencing life as a patient, and as a public healthcare worker navigating the unfamiliar world of private healthcare. I had come to raise some concerns about having a high resting heart rate, likely driven by nightshifts, workplace stress, and coffee abuse over any pathological cause, but enough of a concern I felt it justified to get seen. After a simple assessment and history taking the GP asked if

I wanted to have an ECG completed for a fee. I was completely baffled that it was an option to opt in or out of a clinical test based purely on the price, a test I could personally do and analyse in about five minutes, and which I later did for myself with the help of a co-worker. Whilst the care my GP provided was appropriate and the ECG had limited utility in my case, this all seemed secondary to the fact that this test had a cost, and as a consumer I had the *right* to pay or refuse, regardless of its potential relevance. It's a sobering thought as to how many other patients engaging with primary healthcare have refused tests or not even been able to see a GP due to a financial barrier, exemplified by the countless 'if only we had caught this earlier' stories. There is little doubt that the provision of primary care within the private economy and its associated fees has killed patients, or lowered their quality

of life, and hampered the development of useful primary health initiatives which are only possible within a public health environment.

A large portion of New Zealand's healthcare services is held captive in the private industry, but in the eyes of most of centre-right New Zealand this simply provides a useful market alternative for those with the means to access it. Yet while private elective surgeries completed by Southern Cross healthcare are often advertised as 'alleviating' pressure on the public health system, in the context of a local shortage of nearly every type of clinician required for surgery it is hard to imagine that this isn't done at the expense of public health. This can be seen recently in the number of operations in Christchurch being cancelled or delayed due to a shortage of anaesthetic technicians, while scheduled surgeries at the local Southern Cross hospital continue. Additionally, as private hospitals don't have a mandate to provide complex surgery, provide emergency surgical services, or staff areas such as intensive care wards, which are vital in the post-operative care of complex surgical patients, they simply are not as efficient in providing the same quality and quantity of care as a public hospital. Accordingly staffing these private hospitals limits the full potential utility of surgical nurses or surgeons in alleviating New Zealand's elective surgery backlog, wasting a large portion of New Zealand's surgical capacity.

This combination of public and private care in Aotearoa/New Zealand leads to a disjointed jigsaw puzzle of a healthcare system, with issues impossible to resolve without the economy of scale, centralised management, and resources available to a health system conducted purely within the public sphere. What would such a system look like? One model I have examined is that of the Cuban polyclinic.

Prior to the Cuban revolution Cuba had a patchwork of unintegrated and overlapping medical structures, including fee-for-services practices and public assistance for the poor. Medical practices rarely offered preventive medicine and never a complete range of services. Following the revolution Cuba pioneered a 'family doctor and nurse' model, every neighbourhood having a family doctor responsible for keeping track of every patient in their area, with nurses and social workers making regular house visits. They are based in a network of some 450 community polyclinics and 1500 smaller clinics. A polyclinic is a large primary care facility providing some 20 specialist services such as radiology, counselling, laboratory testing, dental surgery, and others, with a rotating staff of visiting medical specialists. Each clinic has at least a GP, a nurse, a paediatrician, an obstetrician/gynaecologist, and a social worker; it serves a population of between 30 and 60 thousand and collaborates closely with between 20 and 40 local clinics. All Cubans have free access to a family doctor and a nurse. The health professionals are responsible for the primary medical care of the population, and prioritise the most vulnerable children, the elderly, and pregnant women. The emphasis is on prevention, close attention being paid to hygiene, nutrition and exercise. Polyclinics are structured around tight internal integration, offering a full range of services at a single location. They provide a single point of entry into the medical system, and maintain a complete record of patients' medical histories. They deal with 80% of cases, the remainder being referred to specialist hospitals.

Nearly all polyclinics have national accreditation to teach medical, nursing and allied health students, offering direct patient engagement and community-based learning. Cuba has an average of 9 doctors

per 1000 people, compared to an OECD average of 3.4, with New Zealand slightly above that at 3.6. To promulgate messages around good health and disease prevention, Cuba employs a community-based approach using a train-the-trainer method. Health professionals, community leaders, and other volunteers receive training on specific programs and practices, and then become the go-to in their local communities. The newly trained community leaders then help to spread awareness or troubleshoot health issues as they arise, especially cases of sexual and mental health problems. The cornerstone of the Cuban healthcare system is health promotion and disease prevention, with the primary goal to prevent or control health issues before they progress into deadly, costly, or otherwise unmanageable conditions. It provides a single, universal, public health system with the ability to mobilise and adapt human resources to confront new situations, and this in spite of considerable resource restraints. As one commentator has remarked Cuba provides a first-class public health service in spite of having a third-world economy.

It's possible to compare the services of a larger private practice to a polyclinic, but this integration between its different internal services and other external services is impossible if referrals or new diagnostic tests incur a cost. These costs and the associated bureaucracy create a friction that slows treatment, wastes the time of clinicians, and prevents poorer patients from seeking essential care. Simply put, if conducted within the private economy a polyclinic is simply a larger GP practice with more services to be segregated by financial barriers, nullifying the utility behind its premise.

When first implemented in Cuba a central aim was to improve access to basic and specialist medical services for rural

populations, underserved for years with most doctors working in more lucrative metropolitan centres such as Havana. Only through state control could polyclinics be built in 'un-profitable' regions where the need was highest, with appropriate clinical labour allocated. While a dramatic comparison the central driving forces of our own massive rural health inequalities are similar; rural locations often don't necessitate a large public hospital and aren't profitable enough for adequate private care to fill in the vacuum. Even when in place these services, whether public or private, simply can't compete with metropolitan centres in terms of recruitment, with lacklustre to non-existent government initiatives to encourage clinicians to work rurally. These ramifications are primarily felt by poorer rural New Zealanders, who must pay the travel and accommodation fees associated with seeing distant primary or specialist health services, and are additionally more likely to regularly require these services due to the inverse relationship between health and socio-economic status.

This struggle over recruitment and labour allocation is worsened by the continued lack of government support for young New Zealanders studying health. Nurses for example must complete more than a thousand hours of clinical placement whilst studying, with no financial reimbursement. Although this time is intended to be educational, due to chronic understaffing student nurses are treated as free labour, spending most of this time on simple tasks such as cleaning and washing patients. Given the degree of time and money required of health students when studying, it is a legitimate question as to why a cardiologist or specialist renal nurse shouldn't work privately, maximising their return on their educational investment, instead of working within



public healthcare. Provision of specialist services to Cuban polyclinics is only possible through its centralised management of the labour market, supported and made legitimate by the provision of free training and supported study for students. While this may seem draconian to some on the right this simply involves clinicians listing preferences for their future hospital and clinic location and the state allocating accordingly, functionally expanding a system identical to how first year doctors and nurses are placed within certain wards and hospitals in New Zealand.

This article is not meant to construct a business case for a polyclinic model in New Zealand, but to illustrate it is fundamentally impossible to implement certain services and initiatives when public healthcare coexists and competes with a private care system. The very idea of providing high-quality care within a private system is dubious when the profit motive by its very nature reduces the scope and quality of care offered. Many aged care services, for example, have payment models built specifically around the pension, with a large group of their residents paying through this method. To make a profit a

certain portion of this pension must be diverted from their care. I have personally worked in a facility for a short time with an unwritten rule of only three incontinence pads for residents per day, with the worker actively penalised if this was broken. This facility, by the nature of the model it operates within, implemented this to increase profits and maximise the amount of a resident's pension it could divert from their care. This is the efficiency lauded by the proponents of private health care, not the efficiency of treatment or care but the efficiency at which patient or government money is redirected into their own pockets. The idea of expanding public health to cover aged care, primary care, and other private services may seem impractical to some but we are already providing these services to these patients by virtue of the government paying for much of it through the pension, ACC, local service contracts and outsourcing. The biggest functional change is simply the removal of the private middleman, who exists only to feed off a portion of the funding intended for patient care. Simply put, patients of New Zealand unite, you have nothing to lose but your co-payments.

**DOCTOR'S SURGERY
IN JAIMANITAS,
DECORATED
BY ARTIST JOSÉ
RODRÍGUEZ
FUSTER, HAVANA,
CUBA**

CREDIT:
SOYDCUBA
WIKIPEDIA

REFLECTIONS ON APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

ANDREW TAIT

The Aftermath of Apartheid

Violent crime, leaking sewers, potholed roads, everyday blackouts, shanty towns vast as any city, failing schools, overwhelmed hospitals, refugees and pogroms against refugees and, of course, venal, self-serving politicians. This is life in the aftermath of apartheid

I returned to South Africa this year for the first time since my family emigrated in 1987. While this was not a holiday or a sightseeing tour, the sights I have seen impressed on me how much a society can fail and yet still work—even inspire. Gauteng (formerly known as Johannesburg) is both falling apart and booming at the same time.

The daily black outs are symptomatic of modern South Africa. They cost the economy dear and make life a misery for millions, but the fault lies with a parasitic few—the politicians like former president Jacob Zuma, who failed to build new power stations but succeeded mightily at building himself a palace in Nkandla, and his lower level imitators, who steal wires

and machinery to sell for scrap. Ordinary South Africans feel under siege but react with courage, resilience and resistance—whether it is through informal settlement organisations like Abahlali base Mjondolo or in the rush to install solar panels.

The roads are badly maintained and traffic lights often out of action, but most motorists drive with consideration and politeness—with a few exceptions, usually the drivers of BMWs and Mercedes! Public transport is in a dire state—passenger trains lie unused and decaying and municipalities struggle to pay for buses, but the void is filled by taxis, which have sprung up in an informal way to move people around the country. As the state withers, committees fill the gap at all levels, from the shanties to the gated suburbs. Neo-liberalism is the ruling ideology but a practical anarchism prevails at street level.

It is both exhilarating and exhausting, and it is terrifying to see how much a society can fall apart and still have further to fall. Why is the Rainbow Nation, the happy ending of a grim 20th century, falling apart?

The lazy answer—often hinted at, occasionally baldly stated, by some white expat South Africans is that the African National Congress (ANC) is to blame.

This is undeniable at the most obvious of levels. The ANC has run the country since 1994. The state is failing on its watch. Their seldom spoken subtext is that life was better under apartheid. The logic of the answer is that South Africa is failing, just as all decolonised African countries have failed, to industrialise and escape dependence on former colonial powers. South Africa worked for so long, it is implied, because it was run by the right people, white people.

This racist myth is not unique to white South Africans, nor is it shared by all whites. Indeed, one of the many small miracles of South Africa is that openly racist organisations are so marginal. Few ethnic groups will have suffered such an astounding reversal in their fortunes as white South Africans. To be sure, the commanding heights of the economy are still firmly in the grasp of a white elite—despite the ANC's best efforts to boost blacks, preferably themselves, through the glass ceiling that separates the super-rich from the rest of us. President Cyril Ramaphosa is a billionaire (in rands) but he would need more than a trillion rand to make South Africa's rich list.

To understand ANC South Africa, you must understand apartheid South Africa. The white Nationalist movement was born from bitterness at war crimes committed by the British in the Boer War and succoured itself on the suffering endured by many in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Inspired partly by Adolf Hitler and by British and French colonial policy, the Nationalists took power in 1949 and set about creating a whites-only welfare state, a *piet-noir* paradise.

Like Israel nowadays, the Republic called itself a democracy and, like Israel, maintained the fiction by ferocious gerrymandering. Blacks were granted independence in 'separate but equal' homelands,



ruled over by tribal chiefs and puppet presidents. White South Africa retained the best land, the biggest cities, and the richest mines. Not only did that give the regime a democratic fig leaf but it was also an economic boon, as African workers were, at the stroke of a pen, made migrant workers in their own land, subject to deportation at any moment. To imagine how that worked to keep wages down, think of New Zealand's use and abuse of Pacific Island workers.

Apartheid South Africa was a brutal police state—but it worked. For 40 years, a generation, it was an economic powerhouse and a major player on the world stage. It worked because of cheap labour and the Cold War. South Africa was an economic powerhouse because the pass laws meant businesses based in South Africa, including many major multinationals, had access

**BOOMING AND
FALLING APART—A
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CREDIT:
ANDREW TAIT

to an enormous, low-paid, un-unionised workforce.

The brutality needed to maintain control eventually made South Africa a pariah state, but only after decades of hard work by activists in SA and overseas. In its heyday, SA was a valued member of the western anti-communist alliance. White South African military and intelligence operatives worked ceaselessly and effectively throughout the Cold War to maim, distort and disfigure decolonisation in the whole of Southern Africa. As late as 1988 South African soldiers fought Cubans and Angolans in Cuito Canavale—the biggest African battle since the Second World War.

Why is Mugabe a paranoid dictator? Apartheid SA. Why are Angola and Mozambique disaster zones? Apartheid SA. Fuelled by mining super-profits, with a licence to kill from the USA and the UK, South Africa was a military state, a southern Sparta, where a white ‘labour aristocracy’ lived large on the backs of a black proletariat.

It is true that apartheid worked, if we ignore the destruction of democracy, but apartheid had reached its use-by date by 1990. The rapid growth of black industrial trade unions in the 1980s spelled the end of cheap labour, and glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union made SA’s Cold War rhetoric redundant. In the 1990s the Soviet Union collapsed. Western corporates competed with Russian crooks, now oligarchs, to defraud the state of billions, while street thugs stole manhole covers and electric cable by the kilometre. Life expectancy crashed by more than 10 years to just 58 years. All over the former union, wars broke out as new nation states defined their borders and stateless ethnic groups demanded their own states.

The most salutary warning has to be the collapse of Yugoslavia. Never part of the Eastern Bloc, Yugoslavs enjoyed more

political freedom and economic wealth than Soviet citizens. The modern state had a proud history as the only European state to liberate itself from Nazi rule. It was a popular tourist destination for Western Europeans. The economy was integrated and industrialised and intermarriage was common. But Yugoslavia was destroyed by ethno-nationalism just as the Rainbow Nation was born. Yugoslav politicians, almost all former communists, facing a debt crisis similar to that faced by the apartheid regime, adopted ethno-nationalism as a cheap form of politics. You can’t promise to build roads, but you can promise to be a Serb, or an Albanian, or a Croat or Slovene. There was no political opposition with the vision and the necessary prestige to hold the country together.

The difference in South Africa was the ANC. The ANC was a centralised, disciplined organisation with mass support and international credibility. Although moulded organisationally by the Cold War, with command structures influenced by the armed struggle and Stalinism, it was open to a transition that would not be socialist in any sense. The bosses could do business with it. The ANC was able to navigate the transition, but it was never able to provide coherent policy because of a lack of organic connections to the mass movements. The leadership were either in exile or prison during the 1980s. Its strategy of armed struggle was incorrect and condemned the party leadership to isolation from the forces that actually ended apartheid—the youth, the trade unions and the United Democratic Front. However, neither the unions nor the UDF had any strategy or desire to take power. Ironically, the ANC’s slight distance from the struggle increased its prestige both on the streets and in the boardrooms. It also suffered from ideological incoherence. The collapse of the USSR

ACROSS:
TREVORNGWANE,
ACTIVIST AND
AUTHOR OF
“AMAKOMITI” AND
ANDREW TAIT.

CREDIT: ANDREW
TAIT

disoriented the left, especially the South African Communist Party, and the rise of neoliberalism emboldened the right, and the opportunists.

It is impossible to sum up South Africa nowadays. For all its problems it has an economy many times greater than that of New Zealand. It is a key country in a key continent. Failure here will accelerate climate change and political disintegration. Certain trends in South Africa

though—the glorification of wealth for the mighty, consumerism for the many, and crime as the only way out for the poor—are shared here in NZ. We must and we can counter these trends with ethics of solidarity, self-sacrifice and democratic organisation. This is not mere idealism, it is the only realistic way to deal with the disasters being wrought upon us by failed neo-liberal policies.



ANDREW TAIT

An Interview with Comrade Trevor Ngwane

‘What we have to look for is what stops the organic capacity of the working class’

Trevor Ngwane is a socialist, an activist, and a sociology teacher at the University of Johannesburg. He has spoken twice at Socialist Alternative’s Marxism conference in Melbourne, where I first met him. Back in South Africa in January ‘23 for the first time since I left in 1987, I met Dr Ngwane at a burger joint on campus. He was friendly as ever, and generous with his ideas and experiences. He is a lifelong Marxist—so internationalism goes without saying.

Capitalism is a system of contradictions. South Africa is, alongside Brazil, the most unequal society in the world. The paradoxes, like solar panels on every shack in a shanty city, are extreme. Contradictions in society also find expression in the African National Congress, the party that has, for better and worse, carried the hopes of the majority of South Africans for more than 100 years. Much of my interview with Trevor Ngwane was focused on the ANC.

To compare South Africa with New Zealand, I asked whether the ANC contained within itself factions that in other countries would be centre-right and centre-left rivals, like Labour and the Tories. Ngwane disagreed, I think because the history of the party is so different. He said that while there were

bona fide social democrats, Stalinists, and of course neo-liberals in the ANC, he felt that ideological divisions were increasingly blurring, internationally and especially in the ANC. This has historical roots. The South African Communist Party continues to be a major player, as a partner in the ‘Tripartite Alliance’ with the ANC and Cosatu (the Council of South African Trade Unions). However, the SACP does not exist as an independent party but only as a faction within the ANC. To complicate matters further, the SACP lost hope in socialism when the USSR collapsed and sometimes will criticise the ANC from a right-wing perspective. When the ANC and the SACP were unbanned in the early 1990s, membership in the CP was allowed to lapse. The ANC was shaking off the influence of the CP, which had been the most powerful faction of the ANC.

Was Mandela a CP member? Ngwane pointed out that in the conditions of the Cold War, no-one knew who was or was not a member. Communists had to organise in secret in apartheid South Africa, but the CP was well-resourced because of its Soviet support. If Mandela was a member that does not mean he was ever a Marxist or socialist. An activist might join the CP secretly either from conviction, for connections, or for resources. Nonetheless, the CP undoubtedly had some great leaders, such as Joe Slovo, the head of the military organisation Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK). When the ANC was unbanned, Ngwane said, it was Joe Slovo’s name, as much if not more than Mandela’s, that young militants would write on the walls of the townships.

I asked about the danger that South Africa might have fragmented like Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Ngwane said that was never a danger, despite the attempts of the apartheid regime and the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party to foment

division, because the ANC was always opposed to apartheid, to ethnic nationalism. He gave the example of his father, who was born in 1932 and so was 16 when apartheid was brought in. His father grew up in one country and then was forced into another, a Bantustan. Ngwane said 'He would tell me, "I am a Boer izinja, a Boer's dog".' The ANC was formed in 1912 as a pan-African organisation. It was founded by chiefs, so was never against privilege in principle but was explicitly pan-African.

The white Nationalist regime took power in 1948. It worked strenuously to create tribal homelands. These were not only fictional nations. The regime created radio stations in Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho and other languages, and school curricula in indigenous languages—the express design was to limit educational opportunities in order to create manual workers and not intellectuals. The ANC, in response, put such a stress on the unity of South Africa that it became ingrained in the party and in the whole of society. Talk of Zulu separatism from Gatsha Buthelezi in the 1990s, and the apartheid regime's 'third force' strategy failed as soon as elections were held. Even in KwaZulu separatism was soundly defeated.

I asked about the relationship between the mass movement in South Africa in the 1980s, led by young militants, the UDF and the trade unions. Was the emphasis on armed struggle, which resulted in exile, a failure to predict the rise of the organised black working class? Is one of the problems of the ANC in government a legacy of the disconnect between the leadership that was imprisoned or exiled and the activists who remained in South Africa? I mentioned a columnist in one of the African papers who said the ANC leadership had never had enough connection to the masses because they had only returned

in the 90s and had quickly become the ruling party.

That was one way of looking at it, Ngwane said. But being in exile and prison was hard and necessary. The ANC was part of the 1950s African anti-colonial movement. Their experiences were different—in some cases armed struggle, in others the colonial regimes withdrew without a fight. There was often a battle among organisations to be recognised as legitimate representatives of national liberation by the United Nations, which contained many recently liberated countries. Accreditation gave access to the UN and diplomatic leverage. For instance, the ANC, along with the Pan African Congress, its main rival, successfully instigated a UN motion that condemned apartheid as a crime. That encouraged resistance inside the police state.

Honest ANC leaders do admit that at the time they knew next to nothing about what was going on at home but as representatives on the world stage they had a position they could use to advance the struggle. The ANC's overseas diplomacy was one of its great successes, he said. They skilfully managed to pull off a difficult balancing act in the Cold War. Based in London, they nonetheless received support from the Eastern Bloc, from Scandinavian social democratic countries and from British trade unions. Neither the PAC and the Black Consciousness movement were as skilful at diplomacy. This contributed to their collapse.

At the same time, although the sabotage campaign allowed the apartheid regime and their supporters like Reagan, Thatcher and Muldoon to cast them as terrorists, the ANC's military strategy was not pointless. The defeat of the South African Defence Force at the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola in 1988 was the culmination of a long military struggle that brought

the military and security apparatus of the apartheid state to breaking point. The main military forces were Angolan and Cuban. In South Africa the ANC benefited from the enormous boost in confidence the victory gave to the mass movement.

There was, however, a contrast between the younger and older generations. A recklessness took hold in the townships. Slogans like 'They can't kill us all' reflected a resilience but also a kamikaze commitment among youth, just as in Palestine during the Intifadas. In exile this led to a mutiny inside the MK. Young militants who left after the Soweto uprising of 1976 typically wanted to join the PAC or Black Consciousness, but more than anything wanted guns. The ANC had the guns, so they joined the ANC. When they became frustrated with the ANC's lack of action, they mutinied in MK camps in southern Africa. Those mutinies were bloodily suppressed.

The ANC leadership was older. They hated the Boers, like Ngwane's father, but they also feared the Boers. The apartheid regime had a nuclear bomb and they were ready to use it. The name of their testing site was Pelindaba—Zulu for 'end of story', Ngwane said. They were Nazis and were prepared to destroy the whole country. The ANC leadership was for diplomacy because they recognised how unhinged the Nationalist politics was. Mandela said 'we have to negotiate because these guys are crazy'. By the late 80s, the big bosses of companies like Anglo-American realised they would have to deal with the ANC and the ANC was able to successfully woo them, especially at talks (or rather, drinks) in Dakar, Senegal. White capitalists loved the ANC moderates but the transition to democracy was potentially disastrous for the country because the regime had successfully demonised the ANC among

white Afrikaaners to the point that power-sharing seemed to be impossible.

The ANC had to go above and beyond to reassure bosses and the Nationalists that democracy would not mean socialism. 'The ANC was brought in as a moderating force but its moderation brought the struggle forward and the working class recognised that.' The working class overwhelmingly voted for the ANC, even if they were members of other parties, in recognition that they had managed to win democratic freedom for the working class. Now though, young activists ask whether the ANC gave up too much as a precondition for liberation.

Ngwane's latest book is called *Ama Komiti*. It deals with grassroots democratic organising in South Africa. The origins of ama komiti lie sometimes in traditional decision-making, sometimes in trade union shop steward councils, and usually in both. The first mass strike was in Durban in 1973. Unions had to be worker controlled because apartheid police would pick off organisers. Shop stewards were liable to arrest and deportation, or worse. Dues were often collected by members themselves. Strikes were spontaneous and adversarial. If a boss wanted workers to go back, they had to negotiate with a mass meeting—there were no official representatives and no closed-door meetings. The bosses needed legal unions because they needed 'responsible' officials to negotiate with.

Street committees in some cases created liberated areas in the townships—'yard socialism' in East London and Graaf Reinet township were high points in radical democracy in SA.

These committees were powerful because they linked grassroots struggles to an overall vision of social change. Originally the demand of the mass movement of the 80s led by the UDF and the

unions was for participatory democracy, not representative democracy. This was the single biggest concession the ANC made to win power, Ngwane said. The ANC made this concession because the ANC (and SACP) understanding of socialism was the post-revolutionary USSR, not the participatory democracy of the Bolshevik period. The fall of the USSR meant the SACP in particular lost its political and moral compass.

The ANC and the CP, having lost their faith, have systematically attacked any vision of socialism as unrealistic, as impossible. This is their greatest fault, Ngwane said. The problem now is to try and show young people the sense of power and possibility that comes from being part of mass action. Workers who have had this experience hold it close to their hearts as their greatest treasure, he said. They keep it close, hidden, because they don't want this treasure to be treated like trash.

'Demoralisation is a central term for our analysis. Demoralised people are leading the ANC. They are like a Roman Catholic priest, no, like a Pentecostal priest who doesn't believe anymore but keeps on talking in tongues. You can be demoralised without knowing it and do great damage because of it.'

Dialectics is at the heart of Ngwane's politics. He said you know when an organisation is finished because people don't debate in good faith. In a mass movement the collective decides and, if you miss a meeting, your comrades will fill you in honestly on the line that was chosen, and tell you when they disagree with it. When people lose faith in the movement, they distort the truth and don't debate honestly. The difference between Ngwane's outlook and that of many South Africans, especially white South Africans, is a belief in the organic capacity of the working class.

While I was visiting South Africa, I stayed at my aunt's house. I spoke to her neighbour, an elderly white gentleman who had lived through the whole apartheid era. As a child, he would play cricket and swim together at the pool with his neighbours and friends, who were (or became) 'coloured'. In 1949, the government deported coloured families from the neighbourhood. The old man said he remembered their father begging his father to help him. The reply: 'My hands are tied'. Despite the privileges of whiteness and professional status, this gentleman, and his father, experienced history as something to adapt to, beyond his control.

For Ngwane the working class is the revolutionary subject: working people have the interest and power to create a better society for everyone. Whether it is the striking workers who forced the mining multinationals to talks with the ANC or the ability of people in informal settlements to win the everyday battle for survival and self-organise, it is in the struggles of working people that the future can be glimpsed even in dystopic conditions.

'What we have to look for is what stops the organic capacity of the working class, for example the SACP. Our group has a saying: "if you can't see it, you have to look harder".'

JOHN KERR

The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale

In January I had the privilege of addressing the Canterbury Socialist Society on the battle of Cuito Cuanavale and the role it played in the collapse of Apartheid. Since then I have read Byron Clark's recently published book on the far right in New Zealand, *Fear*, and the chapter therein on Apartheid and the campaign against it in Aotearoa. This reinforced my view that Cuito Cuanavale must not be forgotten. Nelson Mandela observed that the struggle against Apartheid fell into two parts: that before Cuito Cuanavale and that after. The narrative around Cuito Cuanavale is one of the most contested in modern history. There is very little the protagonists, Cuba and the Angolan government on one side and Angolan rebels and white supremacist South Africa on the other, agree about. What is not in dispute is that there was a campaign in 1987-88 in one of the most remote parts of Africa, southwest Angola, near the border with South African occupied Namibia, that involved heavy fighting between firstly Angolan forces in their civil war, and then South African and Cuban troops. The majority of the Cuban troops were black and Cuba had had a presence in Angola, supporting the nominally Marxist government there, since its independence in 1975. South Africa for its part had spent more than a decade fighting Namibian guerillas operating out of Southern Angola, violating the latter's territory on scores of occasions. By 1987 the global cold war was coming to an end as tension between the Soviet

Union and the west eased. Covert US support for South Africa was no longer deemed as critical in maintaining a racist, but anti-communist, regime in Pretoria. Both the Soviets and the Cubans were also looking for a way out of the impasse that had developed in Angola.

The fighting culminated in the commitment of the cream of South Africa's army, and they were fought to a standstill by Cuban and Angolan government forces. At the same time the black liberation movement in South Africa had successfully set the townships aflame with anti-government unrest. Stopped in its tracks, the South African military informed its political masters that they could continue to fight a war along the Angolan border or police the townships, but not both.

The symbolism of the success of black soldiers in halting a South African offensive was critical in fuelling the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa and beyond. A ceasefire and armistice was brokered by the US and Soviets and the struggle to topple the white supremacist regime moved into high gear in South Africa.

A few short years later one of the first official overseas visits by now President Nelson Mandela was to Cuba, where he made the point of thanking the Cuban people for their support in the defeat of the racist South African regime. We should not forget Cuito Cuanavale, it led to the collapse of a hateful regime and is a reminder of the need to be resolute in the face of fascism.

SOCIALIST HISTORY

RHYS MAXSTED

Daniel Guérin pt. II

‘Be Gay, Do Crime’

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (Audre Lorde, *Learning from the 60s*, 1982)

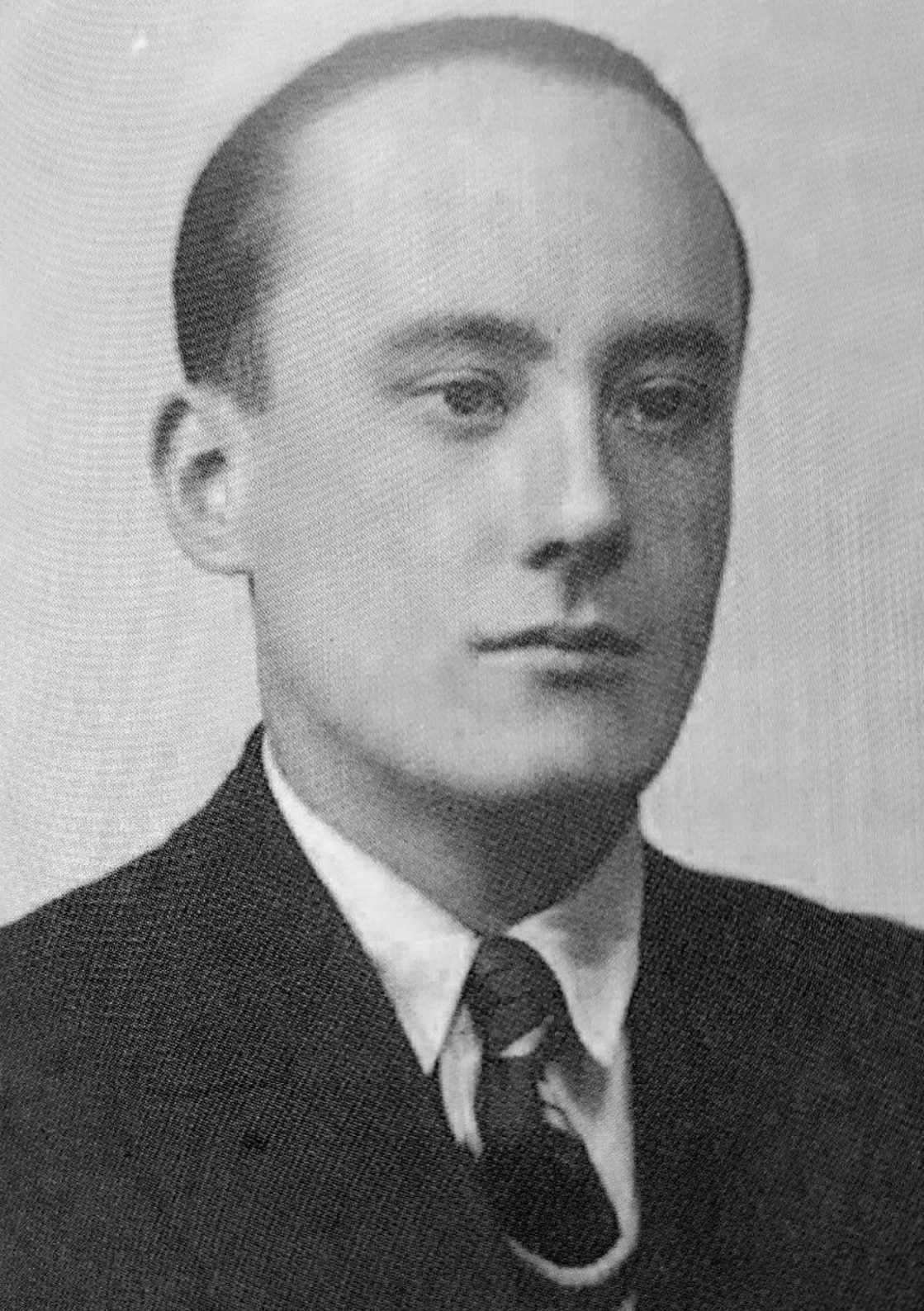
In Part I of my article on Guerin I talked exclusively about his political life but here I will focus on how his identity as a bisexual man affected his experience within leftist circles as well as his involvement with the queer movement of France.

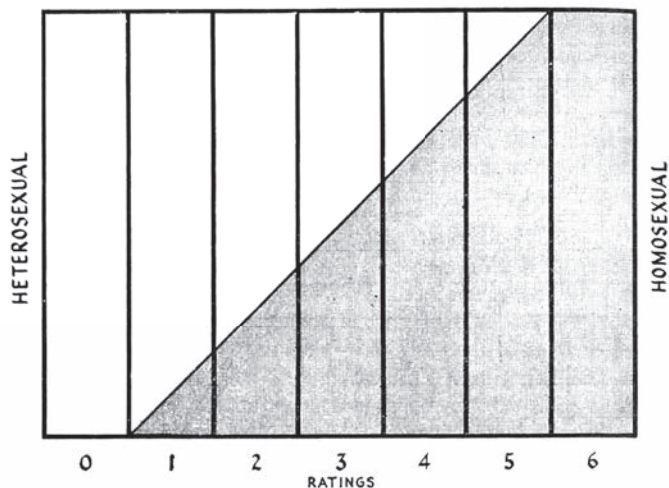
To say that socialist countries throughout history have failed to extend their solidarity to queer issues would be a gross understatement. From the USSR’s 1934 Article 121, which recriminalised male homosexuality throughout the Soviet Union and which could result in up to five years imprisonment with hard labour, to other socialist countries, like Cuba in its early post-revolutionary days, associating homosexuality with US imperialism and perceiving it as ‘bourgeois’, socialists and socialist states have ignored or opposed the struggle for gay rights. Fighting this discrimination was one of Daniel Guérin’s other major goals in life.

At first, Guérin separated his personal and political lives for obvious reasons and only ever wrote about issues of capitalist inequality. But in 1954 he wrote an article in the well-known left journal *France-Observateur* about the American sexologist Alfred Kinsey. Guérin took issue with two main points in Kinsey’s study. The first issue was the idea of the Kinsey scale, which was a way to describe a person’s sexual orientation based on one’s experience or response at a given time. The scale typically ranges from 0, meaning exclusively heterosexual, to 6, meaning exclusively homosexual. Guérin’s issue with the scale was that it was far too binary in its understanding of sexuality and he objected to the way it placed you into a rigid category based on a series of questions Kinsey asked, which were solely based on behavior rather than one’s emotional or psychological thoughts and feelings.

Guérin’s other issue was with the way Kinsey and his team collected data from paedophiles, which is a demographic of outliers in terms of sexual activity. Unintentionally or not, linking paedophilia to homosexuality has been an insidious theme throughout modern history.

Guérin also published a book called *Shakespeare and Gide in the Magistrate’s Court* (1959), where he argued that some of Shakespeare’s sonnets were love poems addressed to a man. After publishing these works Guérin faced severe criticism from his peers on the left. He later wrote, ‘The





harshest (criticism) came from Marxists, who tend seriously to underestimate the form of oppression which is anti-sexual terrorism. I expected it, of course, and I knew that in publishing my book I risked being attacked by those to whom I feel closest on a political level.'

At this time Guérin started to move away from communism to a more anarchist framework, although he did not use it as a means to attack Marxism. On the contrary he strongly believed that 'anarchism is nothing but one of the branches of socialist thought.' He hoped that solidarity between Marxism and anarchism could be achieved. Unfortunately for Guérin there was no solidarity for himself. After coming out in 1965 he was abandoned by his peers on the Left, and his papers on sexual liberation were censored or refused publication in left-wing journals that he had previously written for.

Queer activists and many others were influenced both by the May 1968 general strike in France and significant queer world events like the Stonewall Riots (June-July 1969). This created a snowball effect in France and led to the formation

of several radical national groups that tied gay rights to other social causes and sought not tolerance but revolutionary social change. The gay liberation movement in France is said to have begun publicly on March 10, 1971. On that day, gay and lesbian activists hijacked a radio talk show to forcibly demand equal rights for queer people throughout France. Guerin was involved in the uprising of 1968 and became part of the French Gay Liberation Movement that emerged after it. Frederic Martel later described him as 'the grandfather of the French homosexual movement.'

Until these events, the most political gay organisation in France was *Arcadie*. Fortunately for Guérin their journal, which sold tens of thousands of copies each month, provided him with another outlet for his writings. *Arcadie* organised dances, lectures, and other social and educational events, with the group at its peak having hundreds of thousands of members—predominantly men. In the early 1970s, seeing *Arcadie* as only focusing on gay men's issues, a group of young feminists approached the organisation about setting up a women's group within it. *Arcadie's*

**ACROSS: DANIEL
GUERIN
IN 1925**

**CREDIT:
AVEC DÉCEPTION**

leaders rejected their proposal saying it was too political. By the following year the women were no longer asking permission and strove to create a new group.

Guérin helped found a new national group, *Le Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (The Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action-FHAR). It was created to focus on solidarity with all queer people not just gay men, as well as calling for political change and the destruction of 'fascist sexual normality.' Hundreds of leftist queers began attending FHAR meetings but it wasn't long before the group began to fracture, with Guérin leaving soon after as it did not align with his personal revolutionary beliefs. An anarchistic offshoot called *Les Gazolines* was created by a group of trans men. Additionally, many radical lesbians, such as Marie-Jo Bonnet and Anne-Marie Grélois, disgusted by the sexism and the invisibility of lesbian issues within FHAR, left to form a women's group, *Gouines Rouges* (Red Dykes). Some leftists still criticised the gay movement, the Trotskyist *Lutte Ouvrière* group dismissing it as seeking 'socialism in one bed.' This reflects the notion which we can still see today among class reductionists which minimises all non-class-based forms of oppression. Such groups, said Guerin, bore much responsibility for fostering homophobic attitudes amongst the working class. Guérin and I fundamentally disagree with this take and I believe that it is not only possible but necessary to address the harm caused by non-class-based oppression while striving toward revolution.

Guérin spent most of the rest of his life continuing to oppose colonialism and racism wherever they appeared along with his support for queer rights. He was enthused by the emergence of the Black Power movement in the United States and spoke in its support. But he also became

involved in the struggle against racism in France, and in particular supported the emerging struggles of immigrant workers there. Before he died, in 1988, he was able to see the 1985 legislation outlawing employment discrimination against queer people, but it wasn't until 2013 that France passed the same sex marriage law.

To conclude, Guérin said that he felt more solidarity with marginalised people as he was marginalised himself. He thought members of the working class should similarly be able to draw from their own experience of class oppression to embrace solidarity with people that experience marginalisation in other ways.

While the left has come a long way since Guérin's time, I can say from first-hand experience that the left still has issues with acknowledging the struggles of communities who are marginalised in multiple ways. However, there is a blueprint we can follow as leftists, which is modern day Cuba. Cuba has come a long way from its early post-revolutionary days, as we can see today through its significant efforts to educate its citizens from a young age about the broad spectrum of sexuality and gender, and its incredibly progressive health care including its gender-affirming services and its enlightened view on family and marriage laws. It is a country that we can see has grown to become a beacon of queer rights and is the realisation of Guérin's hope for solidarity.

MARTIN CRICK

Tom Barker and the IWW in New Zealand

Tom Barker was of that generation of socialists who were internationalists in practice as well as conviction, moving around the world as workers and agitators. As a young man in New Zealand he became a union militant and a leading member of the Industrial Workers of the World, playing a key role in the great strike of 1913. As Labour historian Eric Fry has commented, Tom 'retained an abiding conviction that the working class movement rely fundamentally on the strength of its industrial organisations to defend and advance its interests.'

Barker was born at Crosthwaite, Westmorland, England on 3 June 1887. As a boy and young man he worked on farms, but then joined the army, although still under age. Because of scarlet and then rheumatic fever he was discharged as medically unfit in 1909, and then worked as a tram conductor in Liverpool. One day, according to his memoirs, he stuck his money bag over the head of an autocratic inspector, saying 'You take the bloody thing. I'm going to New Zealand...and you can go to hell and so can the trams too.' He arrived in Wellington in 1909, then moved North to Auckland, where he again got a job on the trams and joined the Auckland Electric Tramways Union. 'That was the day', he said, 'from which you can say my part in the labour movement began. The first thing that I had always in my mind there was the necessity for unions and for means of protecting the working people against their employers.' At that

time he was still a practising Christian, although ironically he said later that 'of course I wasn't indoctrinated in anything', and he was Liberal in his politics, believing that it was possible to improve the capitalist system. However, Auckland, 'being so far away from anywhere, had very little entertainment' but 'it was a very active place politically.' And so Tom attended meetings of the Auckland branch of the New Zealand Socialist Party. Its organiser at that time was Australian Harry Scott Bennett, a brilliant propagandist and an advocate of industrial unionism, and Tom was persuaded to join the Party. Its chairman was a brewery worker and miner from Victoria in Australia, Michael Joseph Savage, and its Vice-Chair the Scot Peter Fraser.

The Auckland branch held weekly meetings in John Fuller's Opera House at the bottom of Wellesley Street, and in the Federal Hall at the other end of the same street. Open air meetings were held on Sundays at Queen's Wharf. Attendances were good, collections excellent and they sold large quantities of literature, particularly from Charles Kerr and Co. in Chicago, who still proudly proclaim that they have been 'publishing subversive literature for the whole family since 1886.' Popular newspapers included *The Appeal to Reason* (Kansas) and *The Call* (New York), and it is striking how US influence predominated, the British Socialist movement having little impact in Auckland. Tom attended economics classes run by Scott Bennett, studying Marxist texts such as *Wage Labour and Capital*, *Value Price and Profit*, Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* etc. He later commented that 'I don't know in my experience since, wherever I have been, where this brand of education was so consistently and regularly done as it was in Auckland in those days.' However, he said, 'The trouble was that Scott was suffering



from that famous Australian complaint of being 'boozed', on one occasion hugging the lectern and falling flat on his face.

The Tramways Union was a small organisation dominated by the highly skilled motormen, but in 1910 Tom organised the unskilled workers and agitated for the union to adopt more militant attitudes. There was a growing feeling against the Conciliation and Arbitration system and the following year the union seceded from the craft-dominated Auckland Trades and Labour Council and affiliated with the 'Red Feds', the New Zealand Federation of Labour, whose organiser was Australian Bob Semple. Tom had persuaded them that 'an ounce of Direct Action is worth a ton of Parliamentary string-pulling and Trade Council chin-wag'. At this time the ideas of the Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), were beginning to enter New Zealand. The IWW had been founded in June 1905 in Chicago. One of its founders was New Zealand born William Trautmann. The Wobblies were a syndicalist class-struggle organisation which rejected parliamentary politics in favour of industrial unionism, organising industrially rather than by trade, 'one big union'. The organisation split in 1908, a minority Detroit-based group following Daniel de Leon in arguing for a combination of industrial and political action through his Socialist Labour Party.

The first New Zealand branch of the Wobblies, albeit short-lived, was formed in Wellington in 1908. It was followed by Christchurch in 1910. Bert Roth has suggested that IWW material was first imported into New Zealand by this group. One incident certainly supports this theory. The Christchurch branch of the Socialist Party had no funds to support its election campaigns, but the literature committee did. When the branch decided to use the literary fund

to support electioneering its organisers, largely anarchists, immediately spent the money on a large order for books and pamphlets. They were duly expelled, and then formed an IWW club. Leading lights were Syd Kingsford and anarchist watchmaker Wyatt E. Jones. Some months later over 100,000 pamphlets arrived in large wicker baskets, mostly from Charles Kerr and Co.

The Auckland socialists also veered left, repudiating all forms of political action. There was a strong feeling that if anything was to be done in New Zealand then it had to be done through the industrial working class, rather than the electoral system. In November 1911 a group of Canadian syndicalists, including JB King, arrived in the city, and an I.W.W club was formed in April 1912. In May 1912 Tom Barker announced that he had joined the Industrial Workers of the World, regarding the NZSP as reformist and the FOL as craft and sectional in character. 'I joined the I.W.W.', he said, 'because it supported industrial unionism...one union on one job...In order to get the best out of the power you have, you must be united.' The I.W.W. was particularly vocal in support of the Waihi strike, advocating a general strike in solidarity, and many of the Auckland members went there to participate, but King was forced to leave New Zealand for Australia when threatened with prosecution for incitement to sabotage. Nonetheless, Wobbly influence was demonstrated when the FOL adopted its syndicalist preamble and announced its intention to re-model itself along syndicalist lines. Barker now wrote 'Auckland Notes' for the FOL's weekly paper the *Maoriland Worker*, under the pseudonym 'Spanwire'. The editor of the paper was Harry Holland, who had arrived in the country from Australia the previous year. Harry, said Tom, 'was one of the great

**TOMBARKER
IN 1925**

**PHOTOGRAPHER
UNIDENTIFIED**

gladiators of the working-class movement... He was anti-militarist and far to the left... he had a wonderful speaking voice and an immense range of knowledge.' However, I.W.W. members disliked the paper as it was full of advertisements, 'sporting and society sections', and not supportive of industrial unionism.

In 1913 Tom became New Zealand organiser for the I.W.W. In February they launched a monthly newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*. One striking difference between this and the *Maoriland Worker* is that it made an effort to reach out to Māori workers. Despite its name the *Maoriland Worker* did not have much to do with tangata whenua, nor did they see Māori people as being oppressed by colonialist capitalism. The *Industrial Unionist* however published its first article in te reo Māori in July 1913, and seven in total. During the first half of the year over 100 outdoor meetings were held in Auckland. Tom then embarked on a tour of the country, first visiting Wellington, and then propagandising in Christchurch and Lyttelton in September. Local 2, as they called themselves, 'though small, is active', reported Kingsford. They were printing 4,000 copies of the I.W.W. preamble and sold four dozen copies of the paper at an SDP meeting. They would, therefore, have spread their syndicalist ideas to many workplaces in Christchurch. Barker and Kingsford were arrested for obstructing traffic at the Clock Tower and selling literature without a permit, and fined ten shillings. Tom never paid, instead leaving for a tour of the West Coast mining camps. When the 1913 waterfront strike began he arranged relays of speakers for Post Office Square in Wellington, organised pickets, and ensured Wobbly songs were sung. Strike leaders from outside Wellington were accommodated at the Arcadia Hotel and most, including Peter Fraser, slept

on the floor, but Tom was given a bed. 'I don't know why', he said, humorously suggesting that it was 'possibly because I wasn't going to be a future Prime Minister.' He returned to Auckland to edit the *Industrial Unionist*, now appearing three times weekly, and on one afternoon alone he sold 700 copies on Queen Street. Circulation reached 4,000, an enormous achievement for a small organisation with limited funds and such radical ideas. Barker was arrested for sedition in November and remanded to the Supreme Court in Wellington for sentencing. Because the police were fully extended dealing with the strike they refused to provide an armed escort, and so he persuaded the magistrate to trust him to make his own way to court. On arriving in Wellington he addressed a large crowd of strikers in Post Office Square before going to court. Crown Prosecutor Ostler said that his speech was 'one of the most dangerous speeches made in the history of the industrial trouble and probably in New Zealand.' He was convicted on 5th December and sentenced to three months imprisonment, serving time alongside Fraser, Semple, Holland and others. Released on bond and bound over for 12 months in January he returned to Auckland but, worried for his bondsman and for his own bond, he left for Australia the following month.

The defeat of the strike and the subsequent state repression led many Wobblies to leave New Zealand. The Auckland branch alone lost 15 key members in this way. In effect the end of the I.W.W. in New Zealand occurred at the same time as the end of the 1913 strike. There is no evidence of it continuing after the last *Industrial Unionist* was published on 29th November 1913.

The dominant Labour historiography of 'the forward march of labour' has seen the

I.W.W., along with other left-wing groups, as having its ultimate victory with the election of a Labour government in 1935. This view is erroneous, it downplays the radicalism of the pre-war struggles, and misrepresents the politics and goals of the I.W.W. Tom Barker parted ways politically with all those future leaders of the Labour Party mentioned here, Semple, Fraser, Savage and Holland, although he remained on friendly terms with them. The I.W.W. was syndicalist, influenced by both Marxism and anarchism. Peter Steiner has suggested that 'some wobbly activists' ideas were actually very close to anarcho-syndicalism'. Philip Josephs, co-founder of the anarchist Freedom Group in Wellington, helped Tom organise his meetings there, and British syndicalist E.J.B. Allen wrote a series of articles in the *Industrial Unionist* where he discussed syndicalism and anarchism, and referred to anarchists as 'Direct Actionists', the same term used by Tom Barker to describe the I.W.W. in Aotearoa. Steiner also notes that a number of Wobblies were in favour of de-centralisation.

What is evident is that New Zealand Wobblies, with Tom Barker very much the driving force, made a major contribution to the rising tide of industrial militancy in pre-WW1 New Zealand, and raised the class-consciousness of many workers here. Barker continued to agitate for the I.W.W. in Sydney, editing its paper *Direct Action*. The Wobblies were vociferous in their opposition to the First World War, and were in the vanguard of the campaign against conscription. Tom was imprisoned from March-August 1916, 12 others arrested and incarcerated on charges of treason, and the organisation was declared illegal in December 1916. His most famous anti-conscription poster read 'TO ARMS!! Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians, Landlords, Newspaper

Editors and Other Stay-at-Home Patriots. Your country needs you in the Trenches! Workers, Follow Your Masters.' Arrested again before the second conscription referendum in December 1917 he was held in gaol and then deported to Chile in 1918. He organised waterfront workers there and in Argentina. Returning to Europe he met Lenin in Moscow and agreed to work for the Kuzbas industrialisation project, his role to recruit technicians in the United States. It is worth noting that he refused to join the Communist Party but was nonetheless highly regarded by Lenin. In July 1931 and early 1932 he returned to New Zealand to negotiate an oil contract between the Soviet government and the Associated Motorists Petrol Company of New Zealand and in 1933 travelled to Wellington for the arrival of the first shipment of Soviet oil. He then settled back in England, in London. When Peter Fraser was Prime Minister of New Zealand he always invited Tom to official receptions there. He became a Labour councillor in St. Pancras, and its Mayor from 1958-1959. Tom Barker died on 2 April 1970.

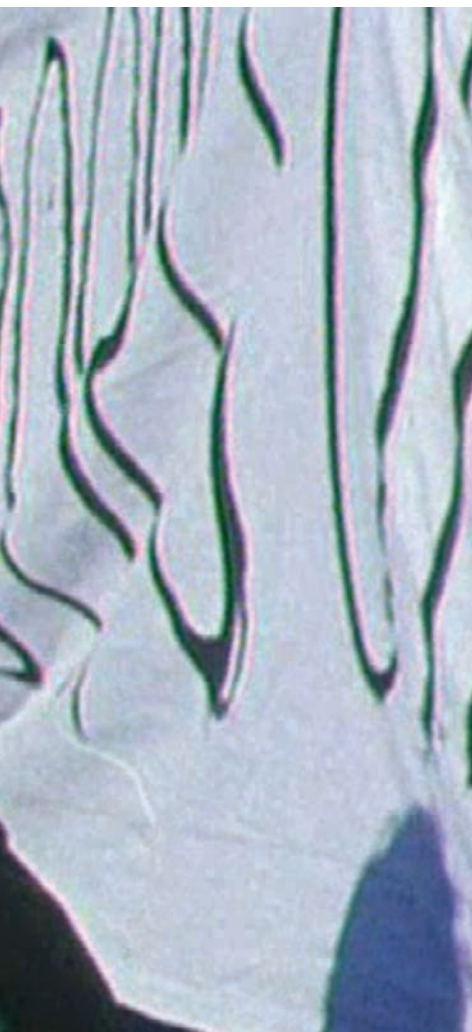
Eric Fry describes him thus: 'Tom Barker was a self-taught man of great talent who made himself a master of speaking and writing, politics and culture. Completely sincere and self-sacrificing in his principles, he accepted the hardships and welcomed the freedom of being a citizen of the world. He loved humanity and enjoyed life, bearing no malice even against those who persecuted him, and leaving behind him a multitude of friends wherever he went. He saw himself modestly as taking part in a movement for the betterment of mankind, a movement which had already taken many forms and would be unending. In old age he was still alert and busy, living for the present and the future to the end.'



DAVID COLYER

In Memory of Jimmy O'Dea (1935-2021) pt. II

In November 2021 veteran socialist Jimmy O'Dea died in Auckland at the age of 86. Jimmy was involved in some of the most well-known struggles of the past six decades. He was an early activist in the anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid movements from 1960, then in opposing the Vietnam War and supporting struggles for tino rangatiratanga on the Land March and at Bastion Point and Raglan



occupations. Through the 1990s he was part of the long, and successful, state house rent strike against market rents. Underpinning all of this, he was a rank-and-file trade union activist and a vocal champion of socialism.

This tribute to Jimmy's life is based on two interviews I recorded with Jimmy in 2009 and 2010, as well as my own memories of working with him. Jimmy was a

great storyteller with an amazing memory (apologising for not remembering the name of a union delegate from 30 years earlier, only to recall it soon after).

There were many areas of his life and activism we never talked about, so these are not really covered. I've also left out much mention of his family—they will have their own stories to tell. The things we did discuss, his early life, and what led to him joining the Communist Party (CPNZ) were covered in some detail in Part 1. Part 2 will focus on Jimmy's early trade union activism, what socialism meant to him, and his role in the Bastion Point occupation.

The texts in quotation marks are Jimmy's own, unless otherwise stated.

At the end of Part 1, Jimmy had moved to Aotearoa and found work on the construction of the Meremere power station in the northern Waikato. Jimmy joined the Communist Party of New Zealand in 1959 after being impressed both by the on the job conditions Party activists had helped fight for, and the Party's role in opposing anti-Māori racism.

Following his move to Auckland in 1959, Jimmy continued to work in construction. He found that compulsory unionism didn't necessarily mean job sites were well organised. Contractors attracted workers with pay above the Award rates (in those days every industry had an Award that set out the minimum pay and conditions of employment), but health and safety regulations were ignored. 'Some of the jobs I worked in were deadly.'

Jimmy noted many building contractors were Irish and had a preference for hiring Irish workers, assuming nationalist loyalty would trump class interest. 'One job, the union official came on the job, and the Irish boss chased him off with a shovel.'

Working on a new science block at Auckland University Jimmy called a

**JIMMY O'DEA ON
THE LAND MARCH**

CREDIT:
IMMIGRANT
NATION 1985
JOHN BATES



(1) BATONED IN FIRST ONSLOW RD ASSAULTS, MAN ON GROUND IS KICKED ...



(2) BATONED AGAIN AS HE TRIES TO PROTECT HIMSELF WITH SHIELD ...



(3) BATONED ON HEAD AFTER SHIELD IS KNOCKED CLEAR BY POLICE ...



(4) MOTIONLESS, AND PHOTOGRAPHER TOLD TO GO

Jim Bache

JIMMY O'DEA BEATEN BY POLICE

CREDIT:
JIM BACHE
'BY BATONS AND
BARBED WIRE' 1983

stop-work meeting and was elected delegate. 'I went up to the bosses and said I've been elected.' They said, 'No, we've got our own delegate, we don't need you'. I said 'well I've been elected by the lads, so from now on I'm the delegate.' 'We got great conditions on that job... But in the beginning we had guys hiding when we had union meetings, because they wasn't used to unions—quite a few Irish guys. But when they knew we meant business and had stopped the stand-over tactics [of the foremen] then they rallied to the cause. In them years a lot of the unions were led by the Communist Party [or had] massive Communist influence.' In Auckland these would have included the truck drivers, carpenters, railway workers (especially the Otahuhu Railway Workshops), seafarers and watersiders. According to Jimmy, the Party had 14 branches in Auckland and held an annual festival at the Town Hall.

As well as branch meetings and on the job organising, Party life revolved around regular sales of the weekly newspaper, *The People's Voice*. 'A bit more discipline came into my life when I joined the party,' Jimmy noted. He proudly recalled getting an award for selling 40 papers in an hour on Karangahape Road. Socialist paper and leaflet stalls were a regular part of his life until the 2010s, when *Socialist Worker*, the successor to the CPNZ dissolved.

When I asked Jimmy what socialism meant to him when he joined the Party, he talked about the practical work of fighting for better conditions on the job and educating his fellow workers. I tried to ask about what he saw as the ultimate goal, but didn't get as clear an answer as I was hoping for. He kept coming back to socialism as something 'You could see operating on the job, you could see the impact... when workers were well organised.' He

noted 'the workers have all the power, it's just a matter of realising this.'

Jimmy also referred to Lenin's pamphlet *State and Revolution*. Writing just before the 1917 October revolution Lenin draws on quotes from Marx and Engels to attack rival socialists who sought to take over the existing capitalist state. Instead, Lenin argued that 'Revolution consists in the proletariat destroying the "administrative apparatus" and the whole state machine, replacing it by a new one, made up of the armed workers. ...why can they [government ministers] not be replaced, say, by committees of specialists working under sovereign, all-powerful Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies?' He further argued that socialism will 'shorten the working day, will raise the people to a new life, will create such conditions for the majority of the population as will enable everybody, without exception, to perform "state functions", and this will lead to the complete withering away of every form of state in general.'

At the time members of the CPNZ, like most communists worldwide, believed this was what had happened in the USSR and was happening throughout Eastern Europe and the People's Republic of China, which together then made up 'the socialist third of the world'. Jimmy was inspired by the reports he read in magazines and from CPNZ members who had visited these countries. Combined with the trade union and social movement work he was involved in, he said, 'I thought we were in the process of change, massive change... In the early days when I joined I saw the revolution round the corner.'

The CPNZ lost much of its influence following the formation of the breakaway Socialist Unity Party (SUP) in 1966. The catalyst for the split was that the majority of CPNZ leadership and members backed China in the Sino-Soviet Split of the early

1960s, when Mao's China asserted its independence from Khrushchev's USSR. For communists around the world, more than loyalty to one or another foreign state was at issue. Published debates between the leaders of the CPNZ and Communist Party of Australia, for example, included issues like the relationship between Communists and the Labour Party, with the pro-Moscow side urging cooperation, and Khrushchev's policy of 'peaceful coexistence' between the USSR and the West, which also implied rejecting the goal of world revolution.

Almost all the CPNZ's full-time trade union officials ended up in the SUP, and that party remained influential in the union movement until the early 1990s, with Bill Andersen leader of the Auckland Trades Council and Ken Douglas becoming secretary of the Federation of Labour in 1979.

In contrast, after the split, the CPNZ was largely an organisation of rank-and-file trade union militants. It even banned members from taking jobs as full-time union officials. Indeed, the most significant strike led by CPNZ members in the 70s centred on the demand that the delegates, not the paid officials, should control negotiations with employers in the North Island timber industry, as depicted in the documentary *Wildcat*. Illustrating his suspicion of the full-timers, Jimmy joked, 'They used to call the FOL the 'fire brigade', because if any little struggle started they'd run over and put it out.'

Bastion Point and the struggle for land

Above and beyond his workplace activism, Jimmy was involved in many social justice campaigns. In addition to the anti-Apartheid movement there was the anti-nuclear movement from the early 1960s, protests

against the Vietnam War, solidarity with the Māori liberation movement, and with the struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland. As a friend recalled at the time of his death, for Jimmy all of these campaigns were different aspects of ‘The Struggle’.

In 1975, Jimmy drove the Ponsonby Peoples’ Union bus as a support vehicle for the famous Māori Land March. In December 1976 development was due to begin at Bastion Point, the headland overlooking the Waitematā Harbour at the end of Jimmy’s street. The land had been taken from Ngāti Whātua by the government for defence purposes and never returned. A memorial to Labour Prime Michael Joseph Savage was built in one part, the rest was a park, much of which the government wanted to sell.

Ōrākei was Ngāti Whātua’s main settlement, but their original pa on the flat near the beach had been bulldozed and burnt down by the government to beautify the area ahead of the Queen’s visit in 1952. Some of the homeless families were moved into state housing up on the hill. Twenty-five years on and the headland was a prime target for developers. Jimmy recalled, ‘I lived in Ōrākei... the Māori Action Committee contacted me one Friday night to come to a meeting at the Auckland Trades Hall on Great North Road... I had a push bike at the time, so I cycled in. There was about 12 Ngāti Whātua from the Action Committee there. It was supposed to be a meeting of the Trades Council, but there were just two people, Andersen and secretary Peter Purdue of the Carpenters Union.’

As noted, Bill Andersen was a leader of the SUP, Purdue probably was too. Jimmy was not only a member of the rival party, he was also then a member of Andersen’s Northern Drivers Union and no doubt caused him all kinds of grief. There was

no love lost between the former comrades, Jimmy regarded Andersen as ‘rotten and corrupt’. Today Andersen is remembered as a hero of the Bastion Point campaign and his funeral was held at Ōrākei Marae, Jimmy told a very different version of events, not all of which I will repeat. It’s a great pity we can’t get Andersen’s side of the story.

Back to the meeting:

‘To get at me ... Bill Andersen says “before you start I want to know what organisations you represent?” I was going to say Te Matakite o Aotearoa, because the Land March had not long ended. Eddie Hawke jumped up and says “he’s one of us, he’s Ngāti Whātua”... This was Christmas 1976 and the bulldozers were coming in on Wednesday. Eddie Hawke [who, like Andersen had been a watersider during the 1951 Lockout] said “We’re here to ask you for some support from the trade union movement”, and Andersen said, “Well the only thing I can advise you would be to get a good lawyer.” At that time I was in the Drivers Union ... I said ‘Māori make up most of the union, Māori are mostly working class. We want more than that, we want a Green Ban on Bastion Point’.

With a green ban imposed, Jimmy’s next action was to go out at night and pull up the survey pegs to further frustrate the construction work. After the Christmas break on 5 January Ngāti Whātua’s occupation of the site began. With the occupation underway, Jimmy was among those sent out to approach jobsites around Auckland to get support.

‘We went out to jobs everywhere. Even though they’d given us the green ban, they didn’t realise we were going to put it into action by going out to the working class.’ Jimmy recalled speaking to a stop work meeting at the Lion Brewery in Khyber Pass, where the walking delegate was an SUP member. The 300 workers

there voted to donate \$2 (\$15.60 today) each for six weeks. The Chelsey sugar refinery near Devonport also gave support. Then there was Wilson and Rothery, the main contractors who were supposed to be working on Bastion Point. Here a union meeting promised to give 'moral and financial support' to the occupation.

'It took quite a while to get it underway, as any decent struggle does... Nobody liked [National Party Prime Minister] Muldoon, so that helped a bit. The greatest thing about struggle is it's a great educator... It was like a university, a living marae, people came from around the world.'

The occupation lasted 506 days. On 25 May 1978 when state forces moved in, 'There were 222 [protestors], but there could have been 1000'. Supporters could not get through the police and army cordon. Jimmy remembers the noise of the Air Force helicopters overhead, and the bulldozer smashing down the marae, an old warehouse that had been donated and moved on-site.

Initially Jimmy was devastated by what seemed like a crushing defeat. 'I didn't make a correct analysis, I got carried away by my emotions, like a lot of people at that time. We didn't anticipate the reaction around the country, the anger that developed and lifted the Māori Struggle to another stage.'

Soon after there was the occupation of Raglan Golf Course, where Jimmy was also arrested and a lesser-known protest at Āwhitu (Manukau Heads). Much of that anger also flowed into the renewal of the anti-Apartheid movement against the Springbok rugby tour of 1981. There is a series of photos from the day of the final test at Eden Park showing a man in a motorcycle helmet surrounded by police who are beating him with their batons, the final image is him laying spread-eagled on the ground. At an exhibition

commemorating 30 years since the Tour, I discovered to my shock that Jimmy was the man in the photos.

I messaged John Miller, the now famed photographer who has been recording social movement protests, especially Māori activism, since he was a teenager in the 80s, to ask if he knew the source of the photos, where I could find them and if it was indeed Jimmy under there. John replied: 'Yes, I understand that the protester under the shield, as shown in Jim Bache's 4x photo sequence on p. 94 of *By Batons & Barbed Wire*, was Jimmy. The "P" shield is one of the so-called 'alphabet' shields, sets of which were produced in Wellington, that spelt out "STOP the TOUR", when lined up in the right sequence. The "P" on this shield thus has nothing to do with Patu Squad. Chris McBride & I brought some of these 2nd Test alphabet shields up to Rotorua, in a van, before the Bay of Plenty match (but not used there) and others brought them on to Auckland for use in the two matches there.'

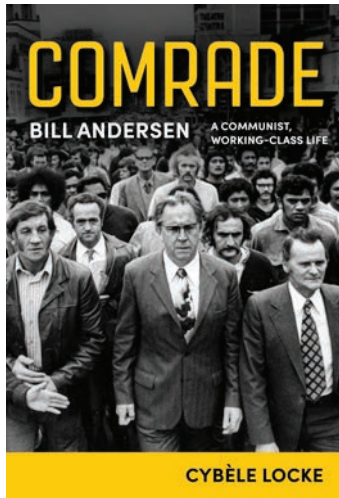
He kept up that sort of front-line militancy for the next 40 years. And in addition to all the various campaigns in which he was involved, Jimmy was also a regular in turning up to help collate and fold the Party newspaper for mailing out to subscribers, as well as continuing street paper sales.

Despite significant shifts in his Party's official understanding of socialism—from supporting the USSR, siding with China, then Albania alone, then abandoning Stalinism and finally dissolving—Jimmy retained an unflinching belief in the potential of working-class people to organise, take power and win socialism.

REVIEWS

VICTOR BILLOT

Cybèle Locke



Comrade—Bill Andersen: A Communist, Working-Class Life

(Bridget Williams Books, 2023)

For New Zealanders of an older generation, Bill Andersen was a high profile and controversial figure. Most younger people will not have heard of him. As a leading trade unionist, he had a certain amount of power and influence in the 1960s and 1970s—he gained his highest prominence in the Muldoon era. He was probably the

best known New Zealand communist of his time.

Comrade is a substantial biography. Author Cybèle Locke is a Pākehā historian at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, a union delegate, and active in the living wage movement. She has published widely on labour and political history, and brings a sympathetic but critical stance to her subject.

This is an interesting, well-written and thorough account of the political life of a high profile leftist, but it is really more than this. It basically encapsulates the key political and industrial struggles of mid-late twentieth century New Zealand, because Bill Andersen was involved in most of them. It is about Bill, but because his life was so intertwined with public events it becomes a wider historical document.

So in this sense *Comrade* is an essential read. Socialism has followed a long and winding road in New Zealand. Advocates like Bill Andersen left a mixed legacy. He, like others, made a great contribution to industrial and political struggle on the local front, but was unable to adjust to the reality that the Soviet Union (or China) were not models of socialism that New Zealand could or should try to emulate. But without that dogmatic sense of purpose, they may have failed to achieve anything. Hence there is a sense of tragedy that hangs over the narrative. People devoted their lives to a cause but the cause (or at least their preferred version of it) ended up as a travesty.

As an official within the Northern Drivers Union, and later National

Distribution Union, Bill subscribed to a 'struggle-based' view of unionism—he had a Marxist view of the basic conflict between the class interests of business owners and the working class they employed. This is quite different from many modern day unionists, who see themselves as in partnership with employers, working to get a good outcome for their members within the capitalist system. Even then, most unionists did not seek the replacement of capitalism. The goal was a regulated system where the State intervened in the market, wages and conditions were negotiated, and a welfare state and full employment improved the lot of the majority. Some may have seen this as a kind of democratic socialism in the making. In any event, the whole show was completely eviscerated in the 1980s and 1990s, and we now live in a more deregulated capitalist system where power has definitely shifted back to the capitalist class.

What made Bill unusual was not his unionism, (unions played a much bigger role in the post war economy and the majority of workers were members), but his longstanding commitment to communism. In the Cold War era this was beyond the pale in a parochial and conservative New Zealand society. The union movement was split between the mainstream and a militant minority. The communists were a minority of the minority (party membership numbered in the hundreds) but they exercised disproportionate influence due to their strategy and hard work. Nonetheless, they were often attacked and pilloried as sinister agents of Moscow (unfortunately uncritical support for the Soviet Union meant there was a kernel of truth in this accusation.)

Bill worked as a merchant seaman, wharfie and freezing worker as a young man. These were all macho male-dominated industries, dangerous and tough,

but they were also the key sectors where militant unionism had gained a foothold in New Zealand. The Soviet Union briefly enjoyed some popularity after it joined the Allies in the Second World War—it's high point in the West was in the immediate post-war period, but the Cold War soon shattered this relationship of convenience. Like others Bill went through the 1951 waterfront lockout, which merely served to confirm his views. The fact is that most union members (then as now) were not greatly interested in the construction of socialism in New Zealand, but leaders like Bill Andersen were known for getting results in negotiations, so they gained respect and support from their practical achievements. Bill himself made it clear there was a demarcation between his union activities and his communist activism.

Bill was a lifelong supporter of the Stalinist model of Marxism. The Communist Party he joined in the 1940s had unswerving loyalty to the Soviet Union, which was seen as the homeland and base of world revolution. Stalin was regarded as a superhuman hero. Unfortunately by this point, in reality, the revolutionary aspect of the Soviet Union had evolved into a bureaucratic, authoritarian State, whatever advances it had previously made. The debate on why and how this happened has obsessed the far left for decades and there is not enough room to go into it here. Suffice to say Bill was part of a dwindling and ageing band of supporters of the USSR—who used to be called 'Marxist-Leninists' (Bill had a small bust of Lenin on his office desk). They didn't appear to have a nuanced sense of Marxist theory and tended towards the blunt hammer approach. Of course, we have the opposite problem these days. Marxism has become a boutique academic research interest that appears disconnected from actual class struggle.



**BILL ANDERSEN
(LEFTMOST FRONT
ROW) WITH THE
NEW ZEALAND
FEDERATION OF
LABOUR NATIONAL
EXECUTIVE 1983**

CREDIT:
PHILIP JAUNCY

In New Zealand and elsewhere in the 1960s communist parties split over support for the Soviet Union or revolutionary China, which had developed a frosty relationship despite their nominal communist leaderships. International unity and international socialism was a fading vision. New Zealand was unusual in that the CPNZ officially moved its support behind China—Bill left with a substantial group to form the pro-USSR Socialist Unity Party. The SUP ran in elections and never got many votes, but they had a number of well-placed and effective operators in the union movement, of whom Bill was the most high profile (along with Ken Douglas, who decades later was reviled by the left for his role as President of the Council of Trade Unions in the Employment Contracts Act era.) The remaining CPNZ gradually moved even further out to the fringes of political life,

but achieved another first when it became the only national Communist Party that then decamped to a broadly Trotskyist position after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, by that stage it was a tiny fraction rather than a political party.

I was on the edges of the world that is described in this book. In the late 1990s I got a job as the publicity officer for the National Distribution Union and worked down the corridor from Bill's office. It had been a tough few years for Bill. The Soviet Union had collapsed and he was trying to get a new communist party off the ground (the now defunct Socialist Party of Aotearoa.) His union had been hammered by the Employment Contracts Act introduced by the National Government in 1991. New Zealand industry had been turned upside down in the preceding decade, and working class communities



had suffered enormously under the new regime of 'extreme capitalism.'

My personal experience of Bill is of a low key but determined character. One of his old allies suggested to me that this biography ignores his often colourful personal life (he enjoyed a drink or two). He was not universally popular amongst unionists. Radicals felt his old school and cautious approach was holding workers back. The Labour Party people were not thrilled with his Marxist critique of their politics. There were a number of fallings out with close comrades as the NDU struggled through the post-Employment Contracts Act era, but overall I would say he was respected by most.

This biography goes into the details of how communism evolved in New Zealand. It's worth reading for that alone. In the end communism disappeared in New Zealand, at least the variety that Bill advocated for.

The CPNZ, the SUP, even SPA are all gone, like a branch of evolutionary history that ended in extinction. In other places they still exist. France has a sizeable if moderate communist party, as does Japan. The Party survives in Russia, and there it appears even more terrible these days than it was previously.

There are still of course small groups of Marxists from different traditions but even they seem to be struggling to exist, despite a resurgence of interest in socialism around the rest of the developed world. The Federation of Socialist Societies would be one of the largest and more successful organisations in New Zealand at the moment, but we are not a party and include both Marxist and non-Marxist socialists (or those like myself who have a foot in both camps.)

The legacy that people like Bill Andersen leave is the lessons we can take from their struggles. If we can learn from their successes and their failures, then perhaps socialism in New Zealand can again become a serious force to be reckoned with. Bill was not born into communism: he observed the world and his experiences of witnessing poverty and degradation in foreign ports as a seaman burned into him a lifelong determination to battle for a better society. The choice in the 21st century will very much be socialism or barbarism. Comrade is an essential "must read" for any socialist, or anyone with an interest in the industrial and political history of late twentieth century New Zealand.

A longer review of this book by Victor Billot is online at Newsroom website <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/when-the-left-were-actually-left>

TYLER WEST

Byron C Clark



FEAR: New Zealand's hostile underworld of extremists

(Harper Collins, 2023)

In recent years a rigorous debate has taken place in New Zealand's media and civil society about how to analyse and respond to the increasingly vocal subculture of conspiracy theorising and its close connections to the radical right. With *FEAR: New Zealand's hostile underworld of extremists* author Byron Clark makes a valuable contribution to that debate with a wide-ranging investigation into the interrelation of those two worlds. *FEAR* lands shortly after Dylan Reeve's *Fake Believe: Conspiracy Theories in Aotearoa*

(Upstart Press 2022) and simultaneously with *Histories of Hate: The Radical Right in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Otago University Press 2023) edited by Matthew Cunningham, Marinus La Rooij, and Paul Spoonley coming a month after. Along with a great deal of journalistic investigation and several documentaries on the matter, clearly great interest has been aroused among the reading public.

Though the chapters are broken by subject, the book nevertheless presents a compelling narrative. It follows events from the minor furor over the planned Molyneux/Southern speaking event in Auckland in 2018, through the 2019 terror attacks, and into the feverish pandemic politics of the 2020s. We're carried along as paranoid rants to a small audience and sparsely attended protests build to a serious movement online and off, leaving us to wonder what could be done to start bringing people back down to Earth (with a few suggestions from Clark himself on where to start). Clark takes us on a whirlwind tour of organisations, introducing readers to a constellation of groups on the radical right and the conspiratorial fringes, from fascist cells to small electoral parties to dedicated conspiracy peddlers. The more thematic chapters cover a broad variety of topics. One takes us to speculative fiction on the radical right, another explores Rhodesian nostalgia in New Zealand, a third and fourth look at the strange worlds of sovereign citizenship and Qanon.

I have some criticisms of this book, but they're as much about what could have been covered as what's in the book itself. Something that is in the book, and has sparked a debate between some academics and journalists, is a chapter on Hindutva (Hindu nationalism). Some have noted a lack of evidence for the presence of an organised Hindutva movement in New Zealand, while others focus on the close

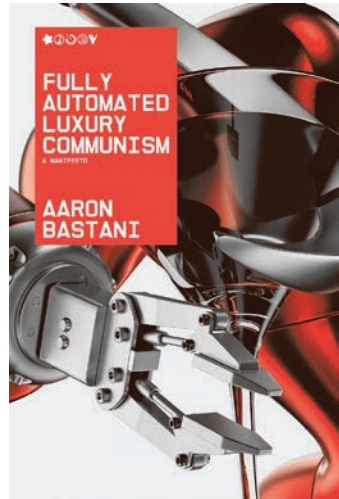
relationship between the Hindu Council of New Zealand and the international Hindutva organisation Vishva Hindu Parishad. I fall somewhere in the middle: while the evidence for an organised movement in New Zealand is relatively thin, it is of concern that a prominent cultural organisation maintains a close working relationship with an organisation so enmeshed in ethnic and religious nationalism.

Much of my critique, however, is about what's absent. Some figures, one notoriously litigious fascist writer stands out, never warrant a mention despite remaining active today and working with some of the organisations in the book. Similarly, some of the prominent conspiracies that tie the modern conspiracy movement to some of their earlier iterations feel notably absent. I, at least, would have liked a chapter on historical revisionism in New Zealand such as those about pre-Māori civilisations, and one which discussed earlier examples of kinds of conspiracy theorising prominent today. False flag and 'planned disaster' theories, like the ones which suggest the 2010 & 2011 Christchurch Earthquakes were artificially generated, long predate those which have sprouted like noxious weeds around the 2019 terror attacks.

As it stands, however, Clark's book is a fantastic introduction to a world relatively few had acknowledged until recent years. For those only passingy familiar with the topic and looking to get a handle on it, *FEAR* is an excellent and readable primer. For those who have been following matters a little more closely it is still a useful drawing together of the disparate groups and figures into a single study. Even with some criticisms, I still heartily recommend this book for those entirely unfamiliar and those all too familiar with the subject.

VICTOR BILLOT

Aaron Bastani



Fully Automated Luxury Communism

(Verso, 2020)

Fully Automated Luxury Communism is a manifesto of a kind. It's also a broad brush account of accelerating technology leading to major shifts in the social and economic structures of all nations.

Bastani argues that the third 'Great Disruption' (the 'Information Age') which we are currently in the midst of provides the productive capability to move beyond scarcity and towards 'fully automated luxury communism.'

The ideas in this book aren't entirely new, but what Bastani has done is synthesise disparate threads into a coherent, if controversial whole, and offer radical solutions.



AARON BASTANI
SPEAKING OUTSIDE
THE GREEK
EMBASSY IN 2009
 CREDIT: UCL
 OCCUPATION

On the politics and economics Bastani draws heavily on Marx but has a heterodox approach. Other historical thinkers he uses to build the foundations of his case include the economist Keynes and management theorist Peter Drucker. Neither of the last two were socialist. But they both perceived the trajectory of capitalism would eventually, and irresistibly, lead to some other form of social organisation.

Keynes wrote a fascinating essay in the 1930s about how future technology would be part of the solution of the 'economic problem' of scarcity and wage labour. He suggested a ten hour working week would

be possible. Keynes saw this as an outcome of compounding economic growth rather than any political programme of class struggle like Marx, but both saw technology as central.

The interesting thing here is how awry both Marx and Keynes were in their predictions, so far at least, when they had in their different ways a prescient sense of the contradictions that plagued the overall system. Capitalism has continued as the dominant global system, despite crisis, war and environmental havoc. It shows remarkable tenacity and flexibility. China is the great enigma, but it is entirely integrated into global capitalism, and in a sense has played a key role in locking it in place.

New technologies are destabilising this volatile system, at the same time as they push it forward. Bastani notes how the exponential growth of technologies such as computing power undermine profitability—a new angle on an old theme. It does this by collapsing the cost of production for certain goods and services. However, one could argue that this works better for streaming video services than buying a seven dollar lettuce!

The book goes into some detail on the relevant technologies. These are organised around the concept of 'post scarcity'. Automation leads to post scarcity in labour ie we have to work less. Advanced renewable power generation means post scarcity in energy. Extra-planetary mining offers a limitless source of resources. Biotechnology solves health problems and food shortages.

The concluding section explains the political mechanisms required to ensure these developments benefit the many not the few. Bastani favours a series of linked methods ranging from Universal Basic Services, as distinct from a UBI, to a kind of market socialism with some reasonably old school regulation by an active State.

This is probably the least radical section of the book, compared with the technology. Most of it is all good solid practical stuff which might lead some to suggest that what he is actually talking about is Fully Automated Luxury Reformism.

Bastani draws on a range of contemporary texts in the field. These include some which are socialist in general outlook, such as Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism*, and *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a world without work* by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams.

Others sources come from a different angle. *The Second Machine Age* by Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee has similar predictions about technology, but from a pro-capitalist perspective. A common mantra is that new jobs we can't even imagine will be created just as they were in the industrial revolution. But other writers think this time it will be different. New jobs will come into existence, but they won't be able to staunch the evaporation of outmoded jobs.

One of the most convincing books I have read in this genre was *The Rise of the Robots: Technology and the threat of mass unemployment* by Martin Ford. It went through all the developments and gloomily concluded things were looking pretty bad. The concentration of wealth and social disruption will create a 'perfect storm', and although Ford advances some useful suggestions you get the impression he thinks there is little chance of them happening.

On the flip side, and this is something important Bastani brings to his arguments, is an enthusiasm for possibility. This can seem refreshing in an environment dominated by a sense of impending doom. An ideology, like a person, can become cramped and cynical when always fighting against the tide. There will be plenty who disagree with his upbeat prognosis. Much

of the left has absorbed Marx's themes of alienation decoupled from the sense of the liberating potential of technology. In fact the modern left is dominated by decolonial and Green ideologies and has been for decades. This often sees Western technology as innately oppressive and destructive.

The political right are likewise fractured. The neo-liberal elite are divided between feel good globalists like Gates and the World Economic Forum, and Ayn Rand style would-be supermen like Musk and Peter Thiel. And a whole section of the right is down the conspiracy rabbit hole some or all of the way. Their fears of a world techno-state and digital totalitarianism is not too far from the paranoia of many on the left. It unfortunately also has some basis in fact, buried in amongst the quackery.

I agree with the basic thrust of the argument in this book. In a complex, urbanised, global society that will soon reach a population of 10 billion people, the only way out is the advance of technology utilised in a socialist manner. But, of course, we are nowhere near this happening. The more likely trajectory is going to be simultaneous rapid technological advance occurring, side by side with the collapse of social and environmental systems. This may well end with pockets of the wealthy elite living in 'gated' zones surrounded by deprivation and chaos, which is a trend already in large areas of the world.

My pessimism means I don't find all of this book convincing. Parts come across as an enthusiastic rave. But Bastani has done something that few other communist writers have done—create a plausible, positive vision of a communist future. For this alone it is worth a read.

ANGUS CROWE

Ashenspire



Hostile Architecture

(Aural Music, July 2022)

*Always three months to the gutter
 Never three months to the top
 Another set of fucking homeless spikes
 Outside another empty shop
 Always three months to the gutter
 Never three months to ascent
 This is not a house of amateurs
 This is done with full intent*

These lines close the ‘The Laws of Asbestos’—the opening track of *Hostile Architecture*, the latest album from Scottish Red and Anarchist Black Metal band Ashenspire. The track sets the tone for the album and Ashenspire’s critique of neoliberal capitalism in post-industrial societies—how architecture is consciously designed to thwart and disrupts the lives of the poor and working class and push them further into the margins so that they are no longer visible to the middle class and bourgeois. *Hostile Architecture* is musically and thematically dense and rewards repeated engagement but at its core the

message is simple: “You cannot fix that which is working as intended”.

I admit that I was skeptical on my first listen. I’d seen *Hostile Architecture* on several ‘Album of the Year’ lists for 2022 and played the record without knowing anything about the band’s politics. The directness of the lyrics threw me and made me wonder if I was listening to a War on Terror era Anarcho-Punk band in Black Metal garb.

But there is a deeper engagement with theory and history on *Hostile Architecture* than a simple ‘F*#k the System’ critique. Ashenspire draws on theorists such as Mark Fisher, particularly his concepts of ‘*capitalist realism*’, ‘lost futures’, and ‘hauntology’, to frame their work. These concepts are not, however, deployed to gatekeep against non-intellectuals.. They are there to provide an inlet for anyone, leftist or not, to start to think about how the world we live in is structured and the material basis on which it stands. The way the work highlights the invisibility of the working class also reminds me of the recent work by Cynthia Cruz, *The Melancholia of Class*. As Cruz writes, “this society ruled through class hierarchy implicitly denies that there is any such class struggle”. Architecture is a tool the ruling class uses to carry out this denial.

Hostile architecture is a term that even many politically engaged people may not know, but is something you instinctively understand when you see it. Ashenspire’s Bandcamp describes it as ‘design elements in social spaces that deter the public from using the object for means unintended by the designer’. Think skatestoppers or hand-rails in the middle of public benches. These, along with the above-mentioned homeless spikes, are incorporated into the architecture of modern cities to prevent ‘misuse’, in these cases to discourage skateboarders or to prevent the homeless from standing,



sitting, lying, or just being in a particular place. *Hostile Architecture* brings these backgrounded items to the forefront and asks ‘why are there here?’, ‘what purpose do they serve?’, and ‘for whom are these actually for?’.

To *Ashenspire* the answer is clear: these design elements serve the ruling class. They prevent the poor and working class from making the city their own. In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher asserts that ‘[i]t is impossible to conceive of fascism or Stalinism without propaganda—but capitalism can proceed perfectly well, in some ways better, without anyone making a case for it’. *Hostile architecture* works in

the same way, it shapes the mind of the working class, reifying our contemporary social relations to such a degree that these design elements seem like a form of ‘common sense’.

Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*, released in 2009, could be said to be much less relevant now than it was on its release. Occupy, the Movement of Squares in Europe (which spawned parties such as SYRIZA and Podemos) and the Euro Crisis, the Arab Spring, and the Corbyn and Sanders campaigns are all much more recent, if fading, touchstones for many on the Left today. Yet *Ashenspire* draws new inspiration from Fisher’s work (which seems

ASHENSPIRE 2022

CREDIT:
CALLUM MCMILLAN

appropriate given that a new edition of *Capitalist Realism* was released in 2022). The political space, at least for a time, felt more open than it did in 2009 when *There Is No Alternative* (TINA) seemed to be all that was on offer.

Yet the focus on the actual physical presentation of capitalism, of TINA itself, staring us in the face day-in and day-out in the form of shitty apartment blocks or, particularly in Aotearoa, Williams Corps (or should we say Corpse?) style townhouse ‘communities’, feels fresh and just as relevant as ever. Sure, maybe there is somewhat more space to articulate a leftist vision of the world. But the actual spaces in which we live, congregate, and build our lives are often just as unhealthy and alienating as ever. The fact that Grenfell Tower still stands in the middle of London as a monument to the very worst aspects of cost-cutting laziness and inequality surrounded by opulence (you could call it a hauntological object par excellence) exemplifies the band’s outlook. ‘Tiers of concrete, tears of undoing’ says vocalist and drummer Alasdair Dunn on ‘Tragic Heroin’. *Hostile architecture* isn’t just the physical architecture itself, it’s the ideological and institutional framework in which we live.

‘Red and Anarchist Black Metal’ doesn’t really allow the listener to infer much beyond ‘loud’ and ‘heavy’. Sonically however, Ashenspire covers a lot of ground. Apart from the standard vocals, guitar, bass, and drums, *Hostile Architecture* incorporates saxophone, violin, and hammered dulcimer (among other instruments) to achieve an incredibly diverse sound. Elements of Prog and Post-Rock (à la Bowie’s last offering *Blackstar*, or Swans), Jazz, and even Celtic music pervade the record. Most of all Ashenspire is on the forefront of Avant-Garde Metal and in its finest form.

Complex rhythms (Dunn’s drumming is suburb throughout) and sections that build to intense climaxes accompany haunting and anxiety producing sax and violin passages. The dense layers compound the sense of urgency that runs through the album. The band also have a knack for writing in 3/4 and 6/8 time signatures, giving many of the tracks a particularly hypnotic quality.

Another major current in Black Metal is the subgenre Depressive Suicidal Black Metal or DSBM. DSBM incorporates many of the tropes that come to mind when people think of Black Metal: hopelessness, suffering, and nihilism. We can see this mirrored in Fisher’s concept of ‘depressive hedonia’—a state in which the subject has “an inability to do anything except pursue pleasure”.

Hostile Architecture allows the listener no quarter in this regard. Yes, the world might be shit, but it got that way through human action, and it can be changed by human action too. To wallow in your own suffering, as DSBM does, is to let yourself off the hook. We need to understand and acknowledge the systems and structures that have been built up, but we don’t need to accept them as natural.

Many on the Left will know the Ursula K. Le Guin quote “[w]e live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings”. But the second, maybe more provocative part of the quote, is often left out. “Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words”.

I’m usually somewhat allergic to such sentiments, but the words and music of *Hostile Architecture* is art that raises important questions with regards to the way the world is, and how we might change it. As Ashenspire put it ‘Tragic Heroin’: “No great men, only the great many”.

BYRON C. CLARK

Revisiting a comedy album 20 years on from the invasion of Iraq

The idea of stand-up comedians speaking truth to power has become a joke in and of itself, best encapsulated by Alasdair Beckett-King whose YouTube video *Every Edgy Millionaire Comedian* flicks between interview footage of a character played by Beckett-King talking seriously about comedy being ‘about telling the truth’ and ‘asking the big questions’, and the same character performing a stand-up routine about having a trash can stuck on his ass. Too often the idea of transgressing social norms is seen as inherently valuable, even when those social norms might have developed in response to recognising how certain groups of people have been historically marginalised. But sometimes comedy isn’t really transgressing social norms at all, it’s just about having a trash can stuck on your ass.

I was something of a comedy nerd in my early teens — in particular, for the largely wholesome comedy of Weird Al Yankovic, which I think holds up pretty well. I also had Jerry Seinfeld’s album *I’m telling you for the last time* (which is kinda funny I guess?) It was after the US invasion of Iraq that my taste in comedy evolved, following a similar trajectory to my taste in music — think going from the irreverent punk-pop of Blink 182 to the angry political nu-metal of System of a Down.

I discovered Bill Hicks via clips played on the edgy youth-orientated radio station

Channel Z, but soon amassed a collection of albums and bootleg recordings. I was starting to check out books by Noam Chomsky from the library, and here was a comedian who had referred to himself as ‘Chomsky with dick jokes’. It wasn’t the pedestrian observational humour of Jerry Seinfeld or the wacky antics of Weird Al, and it was just what I needed at that point in my life.

‘People often ask me where I stand politically. It’s not that I disagree with Bush’s economic policy or his foreign policy, it’s that I believe he was a child of Satan sent here to destroy the planet Earth. Little to the left.’

(Bill Hicks)

Hicks had died in 1994, but his comedy still felt topical. Hicks had made jokes about US President Bush, and the war in Iraq. Ten years later the US had a new president Bush, and was again going to war in Iraq. ‘Shit, a decade after Bill left us, they [the jokes] still sound as if they could have been made yesterday’, wrote Hicks’s friend and biographer Kevin Booth in *Bill Hicks: Agent of Evolution*. ‘Even history has conspired — Bush, Iraq — to keep the material headline-fresh. In ten more years, there will be different politicians and different wars, but the jokes, the principles and observations they were based on, they will still play and still make people laugh.’ I’m not so sure about that, now that we’re closer to twenty years on. In addition to writing the biography and producing most of Hicks’s videos and albums, Booth also co-produced the Alex Jones directed *Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State*, a conspiratorial take on the 9/11 terror attacks and their aftermath. Hicks was also something of a conspiracy theorist, especially when it came to the Kennedy Assassination, and while his political

comedy stands out, Hicks's worldview is incredibly misanthropic, and much, if not most, of his material has women—in particular working class women, who are portrayed as unintelligent—as the butt of the joke.

'I was in Nashville, Tennessee last year. After the show I went to a Waffle House. I'm not proud of it, I was hungry. And I'm alone, I'm eating and I'm reading a book, right? Waitress walks over to me: "Hey, whatcha readin' for?" Isn't that the weirdest fuckin' question you've ever heard? Not what am I reading, but what am I reading FOR? Well, goddamnit, ya stumped me! Why do I read? Well... bmmm... I dunno... I guess I read for a lot of reasons and the main one is so I don't end up being a fuckin' waffle waitress.'
(Bill Hicks)

'I must have missed his sketches about union rights for immigrant workers', wrote John Doran in 2013, 'I mean, for Christ sake, Michael Moore is a level-headed, even-handed Marxist revolutionary stood next to Hicks.' Had cancer not taken him at the age of 32 Hicks might have had a lot to say about George W Bush and his invasion of Iraq, but he almost certainly would have dabbled in 9/11 'truther' conspiracy theories throughout the 2000s and had he lived to the 2010s would probably be talking about 'cancel culture' and have a Netflix special called something like 'Hicks: Trigger Me.' But this isn't an article about Bill Hicks. Sorry for the misdirect. It's an article about Mark Thomas, and specifically about the album *The Night War Broke Out*.

The album was released in 2004, but it was recorded live in Edinburgh on the evening the US and UK military began the invasion of Iraq with the bombing of Saddam

Hussein's palace. Earlier that day anti-war protestors engaged in civil disobedience, blocking the main streets of the city. Over 4,000 people defied police in sit-down protests and school kids attempted to storm the Scottish Parliament. A few weeks earlier people in 600 cities had participated in what remains the largest anti-war rally in history.

'Any Americans in at all?' Thomas asks the crowd, following up with 'they've learned haven't they?' when no one answers. Thomas clarifies that he's not actually targeting Americans personally, and that he's going to be telling plenty of jokes at the expense of the British government too, but this was a time where Americans travelling abroad would sometimes pretend to be Canadian (something that wasn't new, but increased in popularity in the 2000s). Joking about the difficulty of having a war against an international network of terror cells linked through video releases from their leading figure, Thomas exclaims 'it's like a game of Battleship. B3, miss. Oh no you got my Chinese embassy, did you mean to do that!' (a reference to the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade three years earlier).

Thomas had developed interests in both radical politics and performing in his teenage years, being influenced in particular by Bertolt Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. 'I was amazed that a play could make you change your mind', he told *The Guardian* in 1999. If a good performance can change people's minds, perhaps a stand-up comedy show can do so in a way other mediums couldn't, or even if the audience arrives already sympathetic, they might leave knowing more than when they walked in.

'We all know Saddam Hussain's a tyrant...we've known that before fucking Blair, Hoon, Straw, Blunkett,

ACROSS:
MARK THOMAS
SHOWING
SUPPORT FOR
THE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE
OF LONDON
OCCUPATION

CREDIT: UCL
OCCUPATION



Prescot, Cook, all of them. Not one of them signed the early day motions, and they've been ten since 1988 condemning Iraq and the gassing of the Kurds in Halabja"
(Mark Thomas, listing UK cabinet ministers)

The serious is mixed with the silly. Shortly after informing the audience that the UK government's supposed concern for the Kurds being behind their joining of the invasion is a hollow claim, Thomas references Saddam Hussain's challenging of George W Bush to a televised debate, which he suggests be done on the daytime trash talk show Ricki Lake. 'Backstage we've got George, on stage we've got Saddam, join us for Help! My arms dealer wants his guns back!' It's a format for entertainment that works. The audience will quickly go from sombre silence to roars of laughter.

At times short quips put seemingly complex political issues into perspective: 'It's called the occupied territories because it's occupied. If there were no Israeli troops there, it would be called, the vacant area.' He voices a character asking him, 'but Mark, what about the suicide bombers?!' and responds that a person has to be desperate to become a suicide bomber. 'Do you put an ad in the paper? 'Bored with friends, no life, must have own car'? It's a very dark joke, but one that gets at something important. At some point over the last two decades stand-up comedy seems to have lost sight of why this kind of edgy humour is actually transgressive, and decided that simply saying something offensive is a substitute of equal value. Thomas by contract uses dark humour to elicit both an emotional and a thoughtful response from the audience.

Much of Thomas's material comes out of his own participation in the anti-war

movement. He regales the audience with stories of activists he knows, including a long-time peace activist who was arrested for allegedly assaulting a police officer. She tells him she hopes the case goes to court so the jury can 'hear the words quaker, midwife and grandmother'. He also speaks of friends he describes dismissively as 'vegans against stuff'. It's this grounding in social movements perhaps that makes his comedy the opposite of Hicks's misanthropy, something that shows a genuine solidarity with people, notably including the people who experienced racism in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks. He suggests, half jokingly and half seriously, creative forms of protest. In response to a British airline taking two Asian passengers off a flight for looking 'suspicious' he suggests forming a 'league of suspicious Asians' to engage in actions like turning up at the American embassy with hi-viz jackets and fluorescent sticks. It's a joke about racism, but not a racist joke.

The album today serves almost as a history of the British anti-war movement in 2003, told in a way that will make you laugh. It's worth a visit, whether you were part of that movement, or if it was before your time. Mark Thomas reminds us that our activism against war and racism need not be undertaken without a little fun. "We can do what the fuck we want, we can be as imaginative as we want...a bit of playful dissent".

Important Dates in Socialist History January through March

- 1 January 1804** Haiti becomes an independent republic after 13 years of rebellion against French colonial rule.
- 1 January 1994** The Zapatista uprising of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico, begins. They take control of their communities and organise new, directly democratic ways of running society. Despite state repression and violence, the movement of around 300,000 people remains self-managed to this day.
- 11 January 1912** The ‘Bread and Roses’ strike broke out in Lawrence, New England. Twenty thousand workers, mostly women and girls, held out until mid-March, in spite of savage repression. They won all of their demands. The popular name for the strike came from a line in a speech by socialist Rose Schneiderman: ‘The worker must have bread, but she must have roses too.’
- 15 January 1919** Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, leading socialist militants in the German Revolution of 1918-19, were murdered in Berlin by the right-wing paramilitary Freikorps, acting on the orders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).
- 17 January 1961** Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected, and socialist, Prime Minister of Congo, which had gained its independence from Belgium the previous year, was murdered following a coup backed by the USA and Belgium.
- 25 January 1911** Kanno Sugako, a Japanese anarchist feminist, was executed for her part in a plot to assassinate the emperor. One of Japan’s first female journalists, a writer of fiction and non-fiction, she remains the only woman to be executed in Japan for treason.
- 25 January 2011** The Egyptian revolution began, leading to the overthrow of the government of Hosni Mubarak.
- 30 January 1965** The funeral of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. London dockworkers had to be bribed with extra pay to dip their cranes as the funeral barge passed. Many working-class people hated Churchill, who was virulently racist, sent troops against striking workers and against the Communist-led resistance to the Nazi occupation of Greece, and helped to kill up to four million Bengalis in an enforced famine.
- 30 January 1968** The North Vietnamese military and the National Liberation Front (NLF) launched the Tet offensive, which helped to swing public sentiment in the USA against their involvement in the region.
- 30 January 1948** Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.
- 4 February 1885** King Leopold of Belgium declared his new colony the Congo Free State, thus launching one of the most horrific examples of European colonialism. Some 8-10 million Africans were killed as they were ruthlessly exploited in order to extract natural resources such as rubber.
- 6 February 1919** The Seattle general strike, involving some 100,000 workers. An elected general strike committee began to run the city and its essential services. The historic five-day strike proved that workers could self-organise and run society themselves.
- 11 February 1990** Nelson Mandela released from prison on Robben Island.
- 12 February 1978** In Aotearoa/New Zealand 250 members of the Māori Tainu Awhiro tribe and its allies occupied the Raglan Golf Course. The course was on the site of an indigenous burial ground seized by the government during World War I and sold to private developers.

Protests had begun in 1972 when the club announced plans to expand onto more burial grounds. Key organiser Eve Rickard and 17 others were arrested. When the government phoned Rickard and offered to sell the land back to the tribe she rejected the offer, saying they had never sold it in the first place. Protests continued until 1983, when the government gave in and returned the land, which is now home to a community centre.

13 February 1951

Aotearoa/New Zealand's biggest ever industrial dispute began when dockworkers began an overtime ban. They had been offered a 9% pay increase by the mostly British-owned shipping companies, as opposed to the 15% increase awarded to all other industrial workers. The employers locked them out and the government introduced emergency laws, deploying the army and navy as scabs, and deregistering the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF). Both the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party refused to support the workers, but up to 20,000 others took strike action in support and thousands more refused to handle scab goods. Overseas trade unions, particularly in Australia, also sent support. The watersiders were forced back to work after 151 days, and many were blacklisted and struggled to find work for years after.

21 February 1965

Malcolm X, Black Power activist, assassinated in New York. A month before his murder he told an interviewer, 'All my life, I believed that the fundamental struggle was Black versus White. Now I realise that it is the haves against the have-nots.'

24 February 2022

Russian launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

27 February 1900

The UK Labour Representation Committee founded, to become the Labour Party in 1906.

27 February 1973

Armed Native American activists occupied Wounded Knee in South Dakota to protest tribal corruption and the continuing failure of the US government to fulfil treaties with indigenous people. Wounded Knee was the site of an 1890 massacre of Native Americans by US troops. They held out for 71 days and, although eventually broken, the occupation gained huge support, famously from actor Marlon Brando, who boycotted that year's Oscars and sent Apache actor Sacheen Littlefeather to collect his best actor award.

5 March 1984

The great UK miners' strike began in protest at Margaret Thatcher's government's plans to close pits. She was determined to break the power of workers' organisations and push through mass privatisation and free market reforms—neo-liberalism. Previous miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974 had been successful, so this time the government built up coal stocks, and deliberately announced the closure plan in spring when coal was in less demand. The workers remained out for nearly a year, with miners' wives and other women playing a key role in sustaining the strike. The defeat of the miners was a turning point in the balance of power between workers and employers in the United Kingdom.

14 March 1883

Death of Karl Marx.

17 March

Funeral of Karl Marx.

15 March 1917

Czar Nicholas II of Russia forced to abdicate during the February Revolution (so-called because of the use of the old-style Gregorian calendar in Russia).

18 March 1871

The Paris Commune, the first ever attempt at a working-class uprising to create socialism, was established. It was bloodily suppressed, with over 30,000 Communards killed or executed.

19 March 1911


International Women's day celebrated for the first time in Austria, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland. In 1913 it was agreed to set the date as 8 March annually.

24 March 1834

Birth of William Morris, British artist, writer, socialist.

31 March 1898

Death of Eleanor Marx.



This newsletter is published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. The Federation is an organisational body that facilitates the formal affiliation of branches and groups that carry a common cause across New Zealand. First established in Canterbury, the Federation has grown and has affiliated organisations in Wellington, Hamilton, and Otago.

Founded on simple socialist principles, the Federation aims to be a political home for people with a variety of views who come together around a common vision of socialism. By socialism we mean, in the broadest sense, “the political goal of bringing the working class to power at all levels of society in order to establish a system where production is organised rationally to meet human need, rather than for the accumulation of private wealth.” (Federation Charter, 2021).

The content of this newsletter reflects diverse socialist perspectives, not necessarily the views of all members or an official position of the Federation as a whole, and we encourage open and robust discussion and debate on all topics of interest.

If you are interested in subscribing to *The Commonwealth* for \$20 a year, or in joining the Federation of Socialist Societies as a member, please contact canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com, or visit www.socialistsocieties.org.nz for more information.

Our immediate aim should be chiefly educational...with a view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or of handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes.

—William Morris, 1884