Where to now for anti-war activists?

This RECENT anti-war movement was the beginnings of such a revolt. It’s the strongest movement of marched, picketed, leafleted and struggled for an end to the US-led war.

It was not the movement’s fault that the US won.

Bush had the most powerful military in the world. He wanted to win a country whose population is smaller than Australia’s, with an economy 2% that of the US.

The fact that over 100,000 people in Australia were mobilized against the war is testimony to the basic humanity we have, but not to the people.

But the enthusiasm, the energy, the creativity of the movement, with its marches, vigils, teach-ins, workdodocs, pickets, and even four bombing the Army Reserve—proves what activists have always argued about the possibilities of activists—people liberating themselves.

Nevertheless, despite a few ongoing activities, that movement has collapsed—is as generally the case when single-issue movements lose their focus.

The question is, what next? What is to happen to the anger, the energy, the radicalization generated by the anti-war movement?

The key to overcoming it is individuals generalising from the issue that got them involved, to see it as the system that is the problem.

The strength of the anti-Vietnam movement was the thousands who saw the problem as one of imperialism, more generally.

That broader understanding sustained their commitment to the movement through the years it took to win, and it gave them an ability to fight on through setbacks.

Indeed, the growth of the recent movement reflected the degree to which the politics of anti-imperialism had been sustained over 15 years.

The TRAGEDY is that by and large, the left is unable to take advantage of the anti-war upsurge.

The Labor left, which played an activist and conservative role over Vietnam, is in obscurity, its parliamentary leaders are indistinguishable from Hawke and Keating, they preach the virtues of hard work, efficiency, welfare cuts and... war in the Gulf.

Because they identified with the regimes of Eastern Europe, must socialists outside the Labor Party were thrown into disarray by the collapse of Stalinism and are now embarrassed to even declare themselves for socialism.

It is a tragedy, because since WWII has capitalism been so clearly a system of economic crisis and war.

Rarely has Labor been more openly a party of the bosses.

To cut through the problems you have to reject the idea that socialism was state-controlled industry.

The self-emancipation of the working class has to be restored to the centre of socialist politics.

Far from undermining our politics, the revolutions in Eastern Europe confirmed much of what we had written.

Many on the left, still finally reject the Stalinist regimes, but also gave up on fundamental social change. A new generation of political activists, of theory, and the experience of revolutionary struggle, was necessary in order to sustain a mass-based activism about the possibility of getting rid of that rotten system.

Many activists will be discouraged by the end of the anti-war movement and the victory of the US. So the same Marxist ideas are just as central now for those wanting to fight imperialism in the future.

The end of the anti-war movement in the US, the end of the of the war in the Gulf, the collapse—and to predict even more explosive struggles in the future.

The ISO today is too small to fill the vacuum on the left, too small to draw large numbers of anti-war activists into our ranks.

But with your involvement, we can build a bigger socialist organisation, one that can have a greater impact on the upsurge now.

—By Phil Griffiths

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Please send me more information about how socialists are organising to stop the Gulf war.

I want to join the International Socialist Organisation.

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