NEW LEFT PARTY TAKES OFF

The New Left Party is establishing itself around the country as the stories inside this edition of 'THE COMET' indicate. First proposals for the July Launching Conference are included (see 'Countdown for National Launch' page 5).

Local groups have starred activities to build the process and have campaigns underway.

The rise of the Liberal Right and the Peacock Throne give the Left a little more time to get our act together.

So, welcome to THE COMET.

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Optimism follows loss of political virginity

I spent 10 years living isolated in the Dandenongs, bringing up two kids, locally involved and forming my political viewpoints. Two years ago I hit St Kilda, a single parent and a Marxist, enthusiastic about involvement with the political activities of the Left.

Soon after the New Left Charter leaflet was circulated and I was impressed by the structure and content of the proposed process. But at the charter conference in November 87, I felt that I lost my political virginity. As a consequence of this unique experience I felt disillusioned and pessimistic about left alliances.

Eighteen months on I have become reinvolved because the time has allowed me to re-evaluate my former position.

I feel that the shuttering events of 87 have been positively significant and consequently useful. Also, none of the viable alternatives offer an unambiguously socialist perspective.

I'm still concerned about the role and position of independents within the process, but more importantly my optimism has been revived.

JILL TOOVEY
MELBOURNE

LETTERS

Creative & positive social vision

A new party of the left in Australia needs to provide a creative, positive and up-to-date social vision for the community which provides concrete means of dealing with every day issues. One of the reasons the left has lacked this approach in the past is that the left has been fragmented. I have great hope that this process will pull together many people in progressive and left movements.

There is a spirit and cooperation and unity in the new left party process which should ensure its ongoing success.

ANTHEA HOWARD
ADELAIDE

NOTICE:
Keep up with the latest... get the news & views in the New Left Party... catch the Comet... the bulletin... Subscribe to your local group. For only $10 ($5 concession), send to your regional NLP contact. See addresses & phone nos. in the page.

DEADLINE:
Next issue - material to be in by June 1st. Send to: PO Box 236 Collins St, VIC, 3000, or fax to J.Gray (03) 548 1794.

REGIONAL CONTACTS:

PERTH: c/o PO Box 541, Victoria Park, WA, 6060. Ph: Marsha or Vic (09) 335 1928; Karl or Corin (09) 361 6531.

ADELAIDE: c/o PO Box 353, Hindmarsh, SA 5007. Ph: Barbara (08) 45 6228.

HOBART: c/o Post Office, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7005. Ph: Ian (002) 236032.

MELBOURNE: PO Box 236, Collins St, VIC 3000. Ph: Jill (03) 534 2172, Mike (03) 387 3230.

LA TROBE VALLEY: c/o PO Box 836, Morwell, Vic 3840. Ph: Peter or Rose (051) 691 665.

NSW ILLAWARRA: PO Box 1905, Wollongong, NSW 2500. Ph: Mike (041) 672 111 or Beverley (042) 284 997.

SYDNEY: c/o PO Box 1214, Sydney, NSW 2001. Ph: Frank (02) 660 2559, Joyce (02) 51 4748 or Audrey (02) 51 4566.

NSW BATHURST: PO Box 566, Bathurst, NSW 2795. Ph: June (063) 31 8964.

NSW HUNTER: PO Box 255, Morpeth, NSW 2329. Ph: Greg (02) 61 1105.

BRISBANE: PO Box 1365, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006. Ph: Bob (07) 344 8767.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

MELBOURNE:
WOMEN'S COMMISSION/SEMINAR and OPEN DISCUSSION ON AWARD RESTRUCTURING:
Monday 5 June, Building Worker's Industrial Union, 500 Swanston Street 2nd floor, 6.30pm - 9.30pm dinner provided, $5 or $1 concession.
Marina Nightingale, union education officer, and women's movement activist will introduce the session on award restructuring and how it affects women workers and low paid workers.
Restructuring changes will affect us all as workers and will bring about profound changes in the relationships between workers and management. It will mark a new era in wage fixing and wage rates.
Therefore it's important that women intervene before the agenda is formally set so make sure that their interests are represented and forms of discrimination are addressed. So! We welcome and urge ALL interested women to come along and join the discussion.

CHILD CARE AVAILABLE: Contact Katherine Goonan ph: 807 4118 or Louise Comer ph: 534 2736 by Friday 2 June

MELBOURNE:
Environment Discussion
Wednesday 31st May, 5.30 onwards.
Pat Clancy Hall, NWIU, 2nd Floor 500 Swanston St, Carlton South.

Feature articles for The Comet should be no more than 400 words. Shorter articles would be preferred. All articles must be signed and the writer's name and address clearly written. A letter may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

THE COMET, MAY 1989 - PAGE 2
Adelaide bursts into song

It was with some apprehension that we wandered into the Upper Refectory at Adelaide University to attend the first public meeting of the New Left Party. We need not have worried about the daunting capacity of the empty room since it was not long before it began to feel small and crowded! Some 75 people (14 apologies! many of them familiar faces from the Charter process, the green movement, women's groups, students, unions and many others were there.

Sing-Song Start

After much annoying of those, Barbara Pocock and Jenny Allen-Bayes got the meeting off to a lively start with a song rendition of "Don't be too polite, girls". We were none too prepared for this...and were obviously not regular "church-goers" either. A report followed on the National Meeting of Sponsors and national developments in S.A. Stephen Darley gave a lucid overview of the state of left politics and social movements in S.A. Stephen stressed the importance of learning from the popular successes of these movements and identified community activity and local action as the key area. He called for a critical appraisal of left "thinking" and urged the participants to approach the work with an open mind.

Eight groups discussed Stephen's talk and the need for a new broad-based political organisation. Reports back showed that there was a diversity of policy interests. These are being collated but indications are that ecology (particularly the urban environment), local affairs, party structure/ideology, trade union links, housing, women, youth, culture and FUN!! were favoured as primary areas for the formulation of policy.

Housework

14 people were nominated and elected to form a co-ordinating committee to further the process of policy formation and be generally responsible for the housekeeping. Barbara was elected National Liaison Contact Person and all in attendance were encouraged to write voluminously about themselves, their interests and skills.

Afterwards, friends, associates and strangers, young and old met and mingled, rounded off with a productive evening which left all but a few feeling heartily inspired and determined to make it work this time.

The enthusiastic housekeepers quickly arranged a meeting held within a week of the public meeting. These details are included in the S.A. News.

Commissions

The Committee nominated the following areas for S.A. Commissions:

Environment

Contact

Liz Hunt (08) 2752054/2052 (W)
John Wishart (08) 45 6228 (H)
Stephen Darley (08) 49 6134 (H)
Women

Contact

Jenny Allen-Bayes
(08) 242 04495/
(08) 47 3300 (H)

Brisbane targets culture & fun

The Brisbane New Left Party group will be co-ordinating policy development on Art & Culture, and invites all participants in the new party process to make a contribution. Please write to us with your ideas, whether they can be specific areas that you think should be included, or of a more general nature.

We believe it's essential to involve people who work in community arts and theatre, play in bands, dance, paint, write, etc. The Communist Arts Group have offered to help by organising a forum in Brisbane which we hope will attract input from the artistic community.

CAG have been successfully organising political/cultural/social functions for many years, and have in their ranks some well-respected authors and artists who have contributed enormously to left culture in Queensland.

After the forum, a drafting committee will put together a draft policy document based on contributions from all sources.

Please send your contribution to:

NEW LEFT PARTY GROUP
P.O. BOX 1365
FORTITUDE VALLEY.
QLD. 4006.

May Day

The Brisbane Mayday celebrations gave us the first really good opportunity to distribute the 'Time to Act' statement widely.

It was the best Mayday march in 20 years and finished with a festival in Albert Park instead of the usual drinking binge at the sterile old exhibition grounds. This meant that we were able to spend the afternoon talking to people from a range of organisations - cultural, environmental, solidarity groups who were invited to take part in the festival.

It's too early to know how many forms will be returned, but most of the people we spoke to appeared to be very interested, and we gained several new members on the spot.

The statements were handed out with a meeting notice attached for 9 May, so hopefully we will see some new faces at this meeting.

We will be holding a public meeting/tea conference in the near future.

NLP blossoms in the Apple Isle

From a circulation list of more than 120 people a New Left Party group in Tasmania has had a strong response from Deloraine, Hobart, the campus at the University of Tasmania and on the East Coast.

Groups in Deloraine and Hobart are being formed. Significant responses from older comrades show the red side of "Grey Power".

Left ALP members have supported a new party, while individually they intend to continue with the struggle inside the ALP.

The Hobart group is preparing a statement on the forthcoming State Election, focusing on what shape the government could take if Green independents hold the balance of power after May 13th.
The New Left Party was launched publicly at a press conference on 13 April. The launch featured John Gandini, (E.T.U. State Secretary and President of the Trades and Labour Council), Claire Howell, (State Secretary of the Aust. Public Service Association and Int. Vice-President of the TLC), Bill Ethell, (Federal President of the Building Workers Union) and peace activists and film director Martha Ansara.

The story was covered by virtually every main media outlet in Perth. The WEST AUSTRALIAN, the main daily ran the story over two days and concentrated largely on disenchantment with the Labor Party. The WEST also reported Gandini who said

"We are certainly not a breakaway from the Labor Party and we are certainly not anti-Labor. Wherever we put the Labor Party on the how-to-vote card, the conservative parties will be right at the bottom."

Media obsession with the New Left in the narrow electoral terms was not shared by the more than 70 delegates at the Party's first conference the following weekend. At both plenary sessions and in workshops, participants discussed the educative, co-ordinating and policy-making roles of the Party in relation to mass movements and a range of actions for change.

Workshops were held on some of the topics outlined in the "Time to Act" document. The most popular were those on Aboriginal rights, national/economic sovereignty and the environment. The final sessions were given over to reports from workshops and recommendations for the future.

Group Reports
The Union group looked at why people are leaving unions and the problem of loss of rank and file control. The need for a working group to consider unions' role in the new party was agreed.

Theory and Practice group discussed forming an Educational Committee and a specific Women's Education Group. The need to change point 13 in "Time to Act" to link Marxist analysis, Feminism, Environmentalism, Anti-racism etc became accepted. Parliamentarianism was also considered.

The Economic/Soevity workshop produced a clear report which concluded that policies for self-determination are urgently required, but that this is not possible within present political and military alignments. World economics and military spending need to be understood and the power of foreign capital curbed as a priority along with developing democratic, socially-useful economic policies within the limits of environmental and health considerations.

The Environment workshop was lively and recognised the need for policy which expresses the multi-dimensional nature of environmental concerns. Environment groups themselves could be involved in policy development, as well as incorporating the perspectives of indigenous people. Policy should be pro-active with issues such as uranium mining, proposed petro-chemical and pulp projects and personal practices as components.

Aboriginal trade union activists Carrie Isaac produced a detailed and specific report from a workshop which involved a large proportion of activists around Aboriginal campaigns. Active support for claims for the old Swan Brewery site, a "Rock against Racism" approach and recognition by governments that all resources belong to Aboriginal people in the first instance leading to a proportion of the GNP to be returned to Aboriginal control. It was agreed that the Party should give top priority to issues put forward by Aboriginal people.

Housekeeping
Conference elected an interim committee of 14 (6 women and 1 Aboriginal person) to co-ordinate interest and area collectives, ensure the WA input into national Commissions, manage finances and encourage participation. Most participants declared for direct further involvement, some wished to be kept informed and some opted to remain in existing Left groups. This was an outcome which lead to optimism in a conservative place like Perth.

Red Meets Green
On 15 March the NLP initiated a meeting with the Alternative Coalition, the Valenstein peace group and some unions. This was very encouraging and has been followed up by better relations.

We hope soon to directly involve environmental and peace groups and unions to develop ways to bring environmental issues to union members in a number of ways.

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If you agree "It's time to act" for a new party, SEND THIS FORM TO THE CONTACT ADDRESS NEAREST YOU

Name: 
Address: 
Post Code: 
Phone: 
( ) ( ) (Wa) 

I agree with the general aims and principles of the Time to Act statement as the basis for forming a new party. I wish to participate in and be kept informed about the process of developing and launching the new party.

Signed: __________________ Date: __________________

I enclose a donation of $_________ towards the costs of publicising and organising the process.

I can assist or would like to be involved in the following ways:

If you wish, tick in any of the following details:

Occupation: ____________________________________________
Current involvement in progressive movements, organisations, etc.

Areas of policy interest: __________________ Yes No __________________
Number of political party group: ____________________
Which one(s) ____________________

Skills that might assist the process: ____________________

THE COMET, MAY 1989 - PAGE 4
NLP bouyant on Melbourne's bayside

The "Time to Act" statement has been distributed widely throughout Victoria, at the Palm Sunday rally and via the NLP mail-out. So far over 50 response forms have been returned with over $450 in donations. A special meeting on 12 April which considered suggestions from the National Sponsors meeting. Groups have been set up on most of the suggested policy commissions and Victoria has agreed to nationally coordinate commissions on multiculturalism and party strategy.

Commissions
A Labour issue group has met several times with more than 40 people attending. The group is planning discussions on developing more comprehensive left strategies for the trade union movement.

People from different ethnic communities have met to establish a new party group that looks at issues affecting migrant communities and how to attract those groups to the NLP.

In St Kilda, an inner bayside suburb a local group will get involved in St Kilda issues such as the present controversy over multi-million dollar high-rise development at the expense of low and middle income housing. The group has planned a public meeting in St Kilda on 30 May, with Jack Mundey speaking on urban development issues.

A meeting of interested people in the La Trobe Valley/Gippsland area will be convened soon to plan activities.

Housekeeping
The general meeting set up a coordinating group of commission conveners and other interested people. They have planned a public forum for 21 May. It will be an introduction to the new left party process for newcomers and then the first in-depth look at issues in the party.

Fundraising
A couple of theatre nights, a raffle, (first prize a trip for two to the ferry to Tasmania) and a quiz night have been organised. The other major activity is publicising the party and trying to attract a broad range of people from different areas of work and act.

Countdown for national launch

The Melbourne national meeting in April placed the Launching Conference preparations in the hands of NSW regional groups, in consultation with reps from groups outside NSW. A recent meeting of NSW groups established a Conference Preparatory Committee and proposed ideas for the event. The CPC will be Sydney-based with fortnightly telephone conferences, while representatives of regional groups will meet monthly. Teleconferences may be needed to give interstate groups an input into decisions, and one national meeting is probable.

The committee can be contacted through the new office at Room 35A, Trades Hall, Southburn St, Sydney. Anyone who can help are most welcome and attend conference committee meetings, on the first and third Wednesdays every month, at 6pm.

The recent NSW groups meeting decided to send out a "working paper" of proposals, summarised here:

1. Conference goals: to build on the decisions of the sponsors, there are four main goals:
   - promote the "Time to Act" statement
   - policy: to commence discussion and work about specific policies, mostly through workshops which would take at least half the conference time, and to set up policy commissions which would draft full policy statements for discussion leading up to the founding conference next year.
   - campaigns: to decide on a small number of campaigns initiatives around some "linking" issues of major concern, eg: housing and interest rates, the foreign debt, taking up in the white community the issue of black deaths in custody, internment structures; to establish an intern party organisation which people could join and through which they could participate in formulating, discussing and deciding on policies, as well as in campaigns and activities, up to the founding conference.

2. Participation:

   There was a long discussion about the linked questions of participation and voting at the conference. Several views and proposals were considered before a final consensus emerged. This was that participation should be open to anyone who signed the "Time to Act" statement before or at the conference, but that there should be a cut-off date prior to the conference for the purpose of allocating voting quotas to regional groups, (see next point). It was agreed that we should strive for the biggest possible attendance and participation in the conference from all centres, and that it should have cultural and "festive" aspects.

3. Voting:

   As agreed at the national sponsors meeting, there would be few issues requiring votes at the launching conference, and that most decisions would be by consensus if possible. However, some method of voting should be decided on in advance, to prevent misunderstanding or bad feeling arising at or after the conference if some important issues had to be voted upon.

   This was particularly because Sydney and NSW would inevitably dominate numerically. Various principles and methods were canvassed, including proxy votes for interstate groups, weighted or plural voting to ensure Sydney participants did not dominate, and election of delegates from regional groups.

   The final proposal was that a cut-off date should be set (eg 15 July), when each regional group would be allocated a number of votes in proportion to their number of signatories. Each group would then democratically decide how to allocate those votes to ensure that they fairly represented the make-up and views of those in the group.
What do women want - a vision for a new party?

Melbourne women's discussions centre on our vision for a new left party. There has been a remarkable degree of cohesion.

We've agreed the new party must break from existing parties, from their political practices, their structures, their images. We don't want a party which is male-dominated, inflexible and dogmatic. We don't want a party which is hierarchical, sexist and narrow. We don't want a party which fails to make up everyday issues or makes it hard for people (especially women) to participate. We don't want a party based on the 'big bang' theory of revolution.

So what do women want? We want:

- An holistic approach - a party which makes the connections between people and social and economic structures, between 'the personal' and the political, between everyday issues (like life in the suburbs) and 'big' issues (like capitalism),

- A theory and practice which makes sense of the world for ordinary people and empowers them,

- At the policy level, feminist policies and must be integrated into all areas (economics, unionism & and all structures. Equal recognition is needed for social, sexual and cultural issues.

* Attention to a localised focus for political activity, particularly in the suburbs. The facility for members to participate at various levels of commitment - "from each according to their ability", "leadership" shouldn't necessarily go to those who can afford most movings. If we're to be a mass party, we can't be a party of professional revolutionaries. Power and roles need to be shared.

* Better ways of organising and of holding meetings - a less formal approach. Political activity can be combined with conviviality. ("Socialism through socials").

* A place for children and activities which pass on our political and cultural heritage,

* A non-academic approach.

* A people-centred party which maximises compassion and the equality of relations between people,

* An end to the invisibility of gays, lesbians and an emphasis on sexual politics - no set expectations about men's or women's behaviour,

* A recognition that the struggle transforms both the participants as well as the noble goal - that process is as important as the struggle.

* A softer, more inviting public image - one which refuses the "dead fish" approach to political iconography.

* A new language. As well as avoiding the usual sexist epithets, we need to avoid terms like "petrifying the non-aligned left" and "raping the environment". Both of these were uttered (by men) at the national sports' meeting. We also need to avoid a hectoring, authoritarian style of speaking.

* A name which symbolises a positive, pro-people approach. We thought that, so far, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the Rainbow Alliance have scooped the pool. Art we creative and committed enough to meet this challenge - and the others encapsulated in one vision of a new party.

Carlett Shute, (for the Melbourne Women's Group).
The Illawarra New Left Party Group (based in Wollongong, on the NSW South Coast) has been going for 18 months. However, like a lot of other groups around the country, we’ve had an upsurge since the issuing of the “Time in Act” statement and we’re now well and truly up and running.

We’ve had 33 coupons in, with donations. These include the initial 15 people whose names are in the statement, and they represent a reasonably good cross-section across the broad left and areas of interest. However, it’s a little early to gauge the potential of support in the Illawarra, as we’ve recently done a large mailout and the responses are not yet all back.

Our 10 May public meeting will be addressed by Barry Hounslow and Frank Street from Sydney plus local trade unionists Paul Mattner and Mike Dywer. We are anticipating a good roll-up (our original public Launching of the Charter statement attracted some 180 people).

The group of 15 initial sponsors has had a couple of meetings, including to discuss the report-back from the National Sponsors Meeting in Melbourne from our three representatives. In March we had a successful “informal launching” of the statement, with a 300-strong audience. At the same time, the local paper ran a good story, following the Sydney media conference, based on prominent Illawarra sponsors of the process.

Central West jumps in

Fifteen people met in Bathurst to form an NLP branch. At least 15 more people have made donations. There are 50 people on the mailing list who want to be kept informed about developments. We set a monthly meeting date at an annual membership fee of $20 with a negotiable fee for the non-wage. I hope we haven’t jumped the gun!

Our supporters and members want action which represents what social justice and socialism is all about. We are going to the Trades and Labour Council, Community Aid Abroad and Bathurst Environment group to set up an action and resource centre. Many people are involved in a range of activities centering around peace, ecology, justice and equity and we want to have them involved with us on issues and campaigns.

Recycling

Another practical venture will be a project recycling timber from building sites and the possibility of setting up a paper recycling group. We have a lot to learn from our supporters in Mudgee who supply the town with organic vegetables and unbleached paper. One of our Lighow members is involved in a reverse garbage scheme.

Study Group

A Mitchell College student, one of our five convenors will invite some lecturers to set up a political discussion and study group. We will work on the social justice and environmental commissions. We have an enthusiastic group who want to head by example and demystify socialism. A contribution to the NLP’s name was People in the Environment? party (PEP).

Jane Dixon, co-convenor, Central West branch.
As an event, the Rainbow Alliance’s Victorian launch was a great success. About 800 people filled Parkville Pharmacy College on 16 April.

The Alliance announces itself as ‘a political movement unlike anything previously attempted in this country.’ The launch invitation stressed the diversity of the movement, addressing issues relating to ‘women, Aboriginal rights, the environment, peace, poverty and civil liberties.’ It also spoke of the movement’s hope to create coherent links between these issues, ‘to build bridges between people, issues and campaigns.’

Certainly the audience mirrored the diversity of the Alliance’s rainbow symbol. Feminists in purple overalls mingled with respectable greenies from the suburbs, well-groomed s-angies in poshmoder black, rubbered shoulders with shaggy peace activism and people from housing collectives, Aboriginal sympathisers spattered red and yellow tee-shirts, and a few hippies bravely matched grey hair and multi-coloured Indian clothes. The only ‘socially active group’ conspicuous by its absence was ‘the trade union movement’ - the workers’ presence was symbolic only, in the red on the left of the rainbow.

A participatory movement
So what does the Alliance offer as a way of understanding this diversity? Its Charter is eloquent and visionary: ‘We propose to create a new stream in Australian political and social culture, a participatory movement of people and ideas capable of welding together the entire range of political, economic and social issues, and of speaking a new language that inspires trust and hope in the future.’

Ok, so the movement is the message. But what exactly are the ideals that will weld together ‘the entire range of political, economic and social issues’?

The speeches were not much help in answering this question, Sue Callinan received an attack on the left hand of economic theory, and proposed a ‘tripartite economy’ for a future Australia, with a large public sector, a ‘very small’ business sector and a sector based on barter.

The Alliance’s Charter which all intending members must adhere to pledges members to combat ‘all forms of domination and exploitation which arise from inequalities between race, class, gender or nation,’ and ‘the coercion of all individuals and environmentally destructive technologies.’

The Charter identifies the cause of this exploitation as ‘a deep-rooted cultural, economic and political disorder characterised by Western-capitalism and other bureaucratisation-technocratic societies.’ Is this an idea that can weld together ‘the entire range of political, economic and social issues’?

Among all these abstract nouns it’s hard to find out who is doing the exploiting.

Sustainable communities - or property values?

The Rainbow Alliance launch promised ‘policy ideas’ and an ‘agenda of our political movement.’ The only concrete proposal offered was a campaign for ‘Sustainable communities’ rising out of the Charter’s task of ‘Building community,’ and fostering ‘communal uses’ the local, regional and national levels.’ It seems that the most active levels of the Alliance are local residents groups, concerned with social and environmental issues and - let’s admit it - property values.

And yet it would be a mistake to dismiss the Rainbow Alliance as merely a movement of middles-class professionals. Its central idea is powerful - this politics means: the empowerment of ordinary people in all aspects of their daily lives and the building of new living cultural and political space from which it will be possible to elude and eventually undermine structures of domination and inequality.

Arguably the people at the Rainbow launch have less need of that insight than do other less powerful groups in society. If the structures are to be undermined, the new politics will have to happen is deprived outer urban areas and their shape may be different there. But the Alliance’s search for renewal is a beginning.