Building a New Left Party for Australia

New Party Launching Conference set for Sydney, July 29 & 30

* You are invited to the New Left Party Launching Conference in Sydney for July 29 & 30 - read Comet pages 4 & 5 and see your regional contact for details.

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LETTERS

Give the silent a voice

There has been a lack of cohesion in the Left almost from inception. Various parties pulling in different directions, causing a fragmentation that creates divisions.

The New Left Party is an attempt to draw these groups together. To act in concert, to create a force of like-thinking people - to counter the erosion of socialist ideals that has occurred in the Australian Labor Party. A new well-organised political party must emerge to counter the attacks or the working class, their salaries, their hardship for life styles, their rights and their pensions. These people are being pushed aside, they are the back bone of this country, the majority of the population but they are the first sold out in the name of economics.

The left in the Australian Labor Party has declined. The few stalwarts of true left philosophy have outlived on for socialist principles. But the influx of opportunists that have moved into the Left, not to put forward a Left view, but to further their own ends is now overwhelming. Left thinking is all but gone in the Labor Party.

Rhetoric

The purpose of the new party should be to "act". To do this we must get to the heart of the problems, cut through the red herring of the day to day living, unison as law, consumerism, domestic violence, single parentism and so on. However, we will never reach out to these people until we de-agonise left politics.

The disenchanted many ex Australian Labor Party people is incredibly large. When a blue ribbon Australian Labor Party area like Broadway sees it has trouble getting a quorum at the branch meetings, there is something drastically wrong. We must meet the needs of these people and do it now, or else the Left will die.

The New Left Party creating history for this country, let's all be a part of it.

L. Blandell

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Letters for The Comet should be no more than 100 words. Shorter letters would be preferred.
All letters must be signed and the writer's name and address clearly written. A letter may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

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REGIONS:

DEADLINE:
Next issue - material to be in by July 15. Send to:
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THE COMET, JULY 1969 - PAGE 2

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.
Nungas repossess sacred land

Early this year Aboriginal people established a present Camp at Mounts Bay Road in Perth to protest sacred Aboriginal land from the destruction posed by the State Government’s redevelopment plan. The Construction, Mining and Energy Workers’ Union in the meantime put a ban on the site.

Aboriginals initiated a court case against the West Australian Government, took out a Court injunction to stop work from proceeding and appealed to the State Government to consult with Aboriginals to resolve the issue. Government MinistersPerth Regs (Planning) and Carmen Lawrence (Aboriginal Affairs) have steadfastly refused repeated request to meet on the and negotiate.

The Old Swan Brewery at the site was the second brewery built in Perth and is about one hundred years old. It is part of an area of immense importance to Aboriginals because of the chain of water sources associated with Aboriginal religious beliefs about the Creation and the contemporary presence of the Living Spirit (the Being - Waungal).

The brewery was built, the Aborigines had no legal standing to prevent its disposal.

The site was registered under the Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1977 and was gazetted on 25 September, 1833 to be returned to Aboriginal people.

Alternative proposal

The Aboriginal people want the old brewery building demolished, the road straightened and the land turned into parkland for all people to enjoy.

The redevelopment of the brewery was to include a Aboriginal gift to the Aboriginal people - an Art Gallery and Museum - this was to house Aboriginal Art and Artifacts from Queensland and the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal people of Perth would like an art gallery and museum but said such-museum must be associated with West Australian Aborigines.

This "gift" will destroy the very foundation of Aboriginal culture, whilst impressively providing Aboriginals with a cultural centre.

The $2.5m the State Government, the $1.5 the Federal Government and the $4.5m expected to be raised via the private sector is expected to fall well short of what is required, this being estimated to be $25m at today’s prices.

ALP ignores International law

On 13 August, 1980, the Federal Government ratified the International Movement on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27) and bound itself within the International Law to protect the rights of Australian Aborigines to enjoy their own culture and to profess and practice their own religion.

By contributing financially to the project that is about to destroy the site and by refusing to host the Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Heritage Protection Act to protect the site, the Federal Government is Breaching International Law.

The State Government will be going against the wishes of a large part of the Perth Community if it goes ahead with the proposed development. Many Community Groups are now involved in the struggle to get the brewery building demolished and the land returned to nature. The area where the brewery stands is on a stretch of extremely dangerous winter roads and for this reason the Royal College of Surgeons Road Trauma Committee have become involved in a very positive way.

Union and green movements are natural allies, says Mundey

Closer links need to be forged between the green and union movements for the left to remain politically relevant, according to the urban environment activist Jack Mundey.

Speaking to more than 500 people at a NLP St Kilda branch meeting held to discuss the effect of development in the bayside suburb, he said the ecology crisis had changed the political agenda. All political groups had to face the growing rate of accepting ecology as a day-to-day issue, along with wages and mortgage rates.

Mundey said the challenge for the Left lay in shaking off the mythology and divisions of the past where worker and environment movements were cast as separate groups with separate goals.

Struggles

He said conservative forces had driven wedges between what should have been natural allies. "In my struggles in the union and environment movements I was always confronted by this contradiction, fostered by opportunistic politicians, corporations and government bureaucrats trying to force people to decide between environment or jobs," he said.

"But we want both: an environment fit for ourselves and socially useful employment."

Mundey said co-operation between the enlightened middle and working classes in common action over urban environment issues in the 1970s had led to a successful Green Ban in Sydney saving more than 100 buildings in the city from demolition. Such common action had also led to the election success of the Green Independents candidates in the recent Tasmanian elections.

Rebirth

Mundey said the union movement’s future depended on it broadening its concerns beyond the economics of the hip-pocket nerve and taking on the issues of urban and nature conservation. He said current actions by unions in Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin and Melbourne over developments threatening the urban environment, signalled a rebirth of the Green Ban.

He said the birth of the New Left Party was also a sign of hope, because there was a need for the Left in Australia to develop a new type of politics which broke from the ‘arrogant” belief that humans had to conquer nature to be productive.

He said, "I do feel there’s a need for a New Left Party that retains a confidence of the ideas of the Left.

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WOT’S IN A NAME?

What’s in a name, you say? Well, for the New Left Party, probably a lot. The name will be seen to symbolize our hopes, our aspirations, our politics. It will do a lot in terms of attracting or repelling members and the Australian public at large. And, it’s bound to be one of the most controversial and difficult decisions we face.

At the National Summit’s meeting, we canvassed a number of possibilities. An obvious choice is New Left Party. While this has become, by default, our interim working title, does it sound too reminiscent of the 1960s? Will people think we’re simply nostalgic for the halcyon days of our youth (or at least the youth of some of us)?

And, if we wanted to tear history in mind, perhaps we could do worse than take up the mantle of the main left party in Australia prior to World War I. The Australian Socialist Party or ASP for short. We could become a voice in the breast of Australian capitalism...

Maybe we could SLAP (Socialist Left Action Party) the ruling class in the face. If we favored a broader name, we might opt for PAL (People’s Action League) or CHUM (Combined Humanists, Unionists and Marxists). And, of course, it would be crucial to decide whether we’re REDs (Radical Environmentalists for Development) or PINCS (People’s Independent National Coalition).

Some comrades favor ASAP (Australian Socialist Action Party). Certainly, for me, and I’m sure many others, a new party can’t come soon enough! A catchy name will certainly give a fillip to the process.

Comrades at the national meeting thought long and hard and came up with:

- SUPA - Socialist Unity Party of Australia
- NLN - New Left Party
- RSLP - Real Socialist Unity Party
- GAL - Green Australian Left
- Gondwana Party
- Australian Socialists
- The Australian Left
- Brand New Left
- Green Alliance
- Earth Fair
- Future Works
- Democratic Green
- Left Renewal
- Solidarity

Some of the questions we’ll need to bear in mind in this process are: should the name include the word “socialist” and/or the word “party”? Should we aim for a one word name? Should we try for an acronym?

If we are to opt for a acronym, perhaps we could do worse than adopt the Phillipino approach - adopt the acronym first and find the word later.

Let Comet know your views ... it’s your name for the future.

by Carmel Shute

PARTICIPATION AND VOTING

Participation and Registration

The national sponsors meeting in Melbourne in early April resolved that participation in the conference should be open to all and that the regional groupings should be on an equal footing. This was to enable equal planning and to ensure that participants were genuinely committed and had been involved in the process.

The Preparatory Committee thought that this condition might be too restrictive, and that many people might have been excluded from the conference, or only decide that they want to come close to the conference date. It is also important that the conference have an open atmosphere. We therefore recommend that participation be open to anyone who actually attends.

To act statement before the conference, or once door as they go in.

However, this openness should be linked to there be a cut off date (we suggest July 14) for allocation of a voting quota to regional groups ensure fairness in any votes which may need voting.

As decided at the national sponsors meeting, mainly a conference of workshops and consultation, for a variety of reasons; paper making, to allow people to discuss and decide what they want to do at the conference, or only decide that they want to come close to the conference date. It is also important that the conference have an open atmosphere. We therefore recommend that participation be open to anyone who actually attends.

by Carmel Shute

WHAT

by David Winder

There are few international gatherings that are so intensely scrutinized as the World Development Report. This report, produced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, is widely seen as a model of how to prioritize government spending.

The report has been criticized for its reliance on economic growth as the primary measure of development. Critics argue that this approach ignores social and environmental dimensions.

This year’s report aims to address these criticisms by focusing on the role of the state in promoting more equitable and inclusive growth. The report also emphasizes the importance of investing in human capital, including education and health, as a foundation for long-term economic growth.

In addition to the main report, the World Bank has produced a series of theme briefs on specific topics, such as climate change, inequality, and urbanization.

The World Development Report is published annually and is available online at the World Bank website. It is a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and anyone interested in understanding the challenges and opportunities facing the world today.
HAT’S IN A NAME?

W. Windrich.

There are no names for ISMs, limiting labels, or "Broad and Overused":

- People want to call the NLP thing a new one yet there's no consistent name that sticks.
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We need a name that doesn't get stuck on our policies, a name that we don't have an easy one.

Broad 'n' blind

I think we should choose a name that is as broad as possible with the following characteristics:

- It should be relatively broad.
- It should be broad enough to include all the socialist and progressive traditions.
- It should provide a good basis for justification.

Some words that meet these criteria are: Democratic, Independent, Community, Peoples Alliance, Australian National, Movement and Progressive. I'll stick with that.

Peoples Community Party

The following are options which were discussed, their pros and cons, and the reasons why they were rejected, or in one case, preferred.

An "Open Conference"

Anyone attending the conference would be able to vote. This would have the advantage that anyone who made the effort to come would feel a full and equal participant.

*Proxy Voting

Proprietary representation of regions.

Referendum Options

After much discussion, the majority view was that for the purpose of the conference, the following options were selected:

* Participation being open to all those signing the statement up to the conference, with registration provided by July 14.
* Votes being allocated to regional groups in proportion to the number of signatories by July 14, with each group deciding how these votes will be distributed to representatives.

This representative voting system could be combined with the taking of "raw votes" of all those present on major issues to see whether there is an overwhelming consensus and to test the views of conference participants. However, if formal votes are required, only mandated representatives would vote.

In conclusion, the "Peoples Community Party" seems to be the most appropriate name for the new party.

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Tasmania divided

Tasmanian society has been polarised since the seventies over a false argument that says you can have either development or a healthy environment. But the issues of jobs and environment can not be separated to sustain future generations.

The need to build on agreement

We recognise that some groups involved in the Tasmanian election have positive positions on these issues. But solutions require a willingness to talk, to develop understandings and build on existing points of agreement. Environment organisations need to talk with those of the industrial left and work towards agreement on a development strategy.

Industry strategy vacuum

In an earlier period heavy industry was the way forward. If big was good then bigger was better. Tasmania’s hydro electric industrialisation strategy was able to play an important role in lifting the industry in the state. This strategy has globally outlived its usefulness, with no effective strategy to replace it.

Struggle against racism in W.A.

Since 1984 Perth has been inundated with racist posters. There is hardly a stop sign or a bus stop that’s not defaced with posters saying “Asians Out”, “White Revolun the Only Solution”,” Is Your Street Soil White?” and “Holocaust a Media Cover Up”.

The Australian Nationalism Movement has pursued a very simple tactic - make the message simple, repeat it and repeat it.

Over the last few years several groups, including CARE (Campaign Against Racism) and WARE (West Australians Against Racial Exploitation) have attempted to counteract the A.N.M. propaganda. They have been involved in poster runs and organising Rock Against Racism concerts. Unfortunately, the A.N.M. has been relatively successful in intimidating their opponents.

The WA New Left Party Group, along with other and racist groups have got behind the idea of forming a broadly based anti-racist, anti-fascist group, something like the Anti-Nazi League in England during the sevenies. So far we have been able to drum up interest across a very wide range of organisations, particularly in the ethnic and Aborginal Communities. We are looking at establishing an annual concert this early summer and a public clean up campaign, along with a steady flow of information speakers, badges, etc.

Most people involved feel that this project will be successful simply because people have had a gutful of the visual violence that the A.N.M. put so much faith in.

If you are in WA and wish to be involved please contact Carl/Coryn on 361 6531.

HUNTER GROUP AIDS FOR A TONNE

by Greg Giles.

The Hunter New Left Party Groups organized a workshop/seminar on "Democracy, Elections and Government - A New Strategy for a New Party". The Hunter Group is co-ordinating the Commission on this, and the seminar will prepare material to be submitted to the Launching Conference in July. Many people with experience as local councillors, successful election campaigners, and in campaigns for other parties and organisations will be invited. The seminar is in Newcastle on Saturday June 24. Other details have yet to be finalised, but further information can be obtained from Greg Giles (ph: 61 1105) or Chris Pood (ph: 26 3028).

Any written contributions or suggested references for this Commission can be sent to Chris or Greg at the Hunter contact address - s.a.p.

The Hunter Group has also discussed new party structures, and after the Launching Conference it is planned to organize a series of functions for special target groups - young people, the community sector, women, environmentalists, trade unions, etc. As well as encouraging new members it will help establish a dialogue with activists in these crucial areas.

Although over 50 people have endorsed the "Tone to Act", this is still well short of the 85 who belonged to the Charter campaign. We hope to catch the magic 100 before the Launching Conference. See you there.

THE COMET, JULY 1989 - PAGE 6
The housing crisis - still with us after all these years

An issue which has been much discussed but has not been resolved on the left is the question of public versus private home ownership. Should we follow policies which are aimed at eventual public ownership of homes or a policy to be used as a temporary measure which we get people out of as quickly as possible? Or do we provide an adequate level of public housing for those who truly choose it?

A seminar titled "The Housing Crisis" was held in Melbourne on 21 May. Colin Jones from the Western Suburbs Housing Group said the housing "crisis" was not new. "... For many years inadequate, expensive, overcrowded or no housing is not a new experience, but rather a continuing experience." He said the housing problem does not cease when confined to the poor. It just becomes invisible.

He said most of the Federal and State government's moves to ease the effects of the housing "crisis" were aimed at easing pressure on the private property market.

Public housing had declined since the sixties and had been largely ignored by governments. He said ten per cent of the land released in Maribyrnong by the Federal Government was reserved for public housing. "The Victorian Urban Land Authority has refused to purchase the Maribyrnong site... and in so far as residential development the land may not be developed in the short term. This land release will therefore do nothing to increase the availability of affordable housing for people in low and medium income, even for those who want to own or become owners in the future."

He said that both state and federal policies have "led to public housing being perceived as welfare housing, and the stigma of being a public housing tenant increasing."

He said a New Left Party should develop a housing policy that "enables people to look upon their housing as their home, one in which they can stay as long as they wish and in which they have an element of control."

He urged the NLP to ensure that all policies were integrated when formulating housing policies.

Contentious

Terry Burke, a senior economics lecturer from Swinburne Institute warned the group what he had to say could be contentious. He said, he said the housing crisis had developed so rapidly that the left has not formulated a position. He urged the NLP to consider housing policies in conjunction with economic, industrial and social justice policies.

He said the immigration rate should be slowed until the housing crisis was solved and better schemes for settling migrants were established. He said the increase in immigration over the last five years from 50,000 to 130,000 was too rapid. He said, "...part of the trouble is that most migrants are going to Melbourne and Sydney two cities which are already suffering from population pressures.

Burke said the ALP policy of attracting business migrants was a very poorly monitored scheme. "The money business migrants bring in is not going into productive enterprises, instead it's going into speculation in property pushing up housing prices still further."

He also criticised the Capital Gains Tax which exempted profits made on the sale of owner occupied homes. He said the wealthy could realise a substantial capital gain and a subsequent increase in wealth by investing in their own home then selling. Working parents with little spare time or income were disadvantaged. Those renting were out of the rate altogether.

He said the property boom was being driven by the tax and caused a negative distribution of wealth to the rich.

Kae Shav, a resident opposing high rise developments in a Melbourne bayside suburb, said residents could save community housing against developers...

Pressure

In St Kilda the 75% of the dwellings are flats and 66% of the population are tenants. Pressures on housing and rental prices has caused a 110% increase in rents - the poorest are moving out, the yuppies are moving in. Two years ago a group of councillors were elected on a platform of preserving St Kilda's socio-economic character. They have helped residents oppose the hi-rise developments and in doing so are running very close to having their planning authority taken away by the State Government. Those in Queensland and New South Wales will be familiar with this tactic.

Building unions have supported the residents, by placing bans on some demolitions and developments. She said the residents and their Council would have had little restraining power with the development plans of the unions had not opposed the developer's plans.

by Colin Jones

"This is a new kind of Left Party with a very profound vision. The Left was based around the contradiction of capital and labour and now we see that you cannot separate the contradiction of environment and development," she said. "Things have changed and people must take on the environment issue on a personal level," she said.

The party initiated a seminar in Fremantle in March this year to bring together environmental activists and trade unions. Cabled Red meet Green, a result of that seminar was union groups and the Australian Conservation Foundation working more closely.

Reprinted from the Fremantle Gazette, 25/4/89 (edited for 'Comet')
Radical alternative to the Accord

A Radical Alternative?

In his book, "The Accord and Beyond," (Pluto Press, 1987), Stilwel projects a programme which uses the Accord as a "stepping stone" for a political alternative to a policy increasingly seen as conservative and little more than wage restraint.

Such a programme begins from the simple, yet not often articulated, proposition that a desirable economic system is "one that ensures its resources - human, natural and manufactured - are used in the interests of society as a whole." Capitalism's inefficiency at such resource management, he claims, is the reason for a system based on production for use, rather than profit. Such a system needs an appropriate mechanism for planning in which resource allocation becomes explicit and the guiding principle one of democracy - hence democratic socialism.

As democracy is, "...systematically vitiated by the "key structure of the capitalist economy" by the coercive and non-symmetrical relations of capital and labour in production, the alternative undermines the existence of democracy from the parliamentary to all aspects of life, particularly in the workplace.

A socialist economy is not a panacea, as existing examples attest, and, (in a timely Earnhardt), "the danger of totalitarianism, even of totalitarianism, is always present." A transitional programme is needed which builds in democratic involvement, unlike the "top-down" processes of the Accord.

Bridgeheads

Such a transition is the key to the difference between a reformist approach and one in which reforms play a role in generating the conditions for transformation of the system. A transitional programme does not reject reforms on the grounds that they do not embrace a revolutionary vision, they are a part instead of "constructing bridgeheads for socialism" within the system as a result of popular mobilisation. For example, Stilwel cites two capital institutions which will be needed in some form in a transformed economy: tariffs and the arbitration system.

The Accord has gone some way in stressing comparative wage justice and the rights of labour to economic benefits arising from increased productivity through a arbitration... these need to be built on as a basis for regulation of a wider range of incomes.

Alternative Package

A policy package is sketched, subject to the participation of the community and workers, which goes to eleven points which could only be described here: Interventional Industry Policy; Increased Social Wage Spillover; Re-regulation of Finance; Planned trade; Housing based incomes policy; Regularisation of monopolistic pricing; Progressive Tax reform; Technological Change and Labour Retraining; Selective Public Ownership; Industrial Democracy; National and regional economic planning.

The likely impacts of these policies are discussed from the point of view of the ALP, the response of the state and capital nationally and internationally.

A discussion is also developed about the political processes involved in an alternative strategy which avoids stasis, links up with the ALP Left and involves the broad social movements. Popular support is crucial to advance the strategy and to defend it from the inevitable responses of capital: a continuous process of interaction between struggles of workers and community groups in which the alternative plays in the first instance an important ideological role is developed.

This is a valuable essay on a subject which many on the Left feel has overwhelmed them; on the one hand the Stalinistic rhetoric of the "cranks" left leaves them cold while the ACTU's successes in arbitration do little for union activity and understanding. Other sections of the union movement unabashedly opt for corporatism.

Union membership decline tells the ultimate story of the workforce's judgement.

What women want in the workplace

For many women workers, the meaning and significance of a workplace has been blurred by jargon and obscured by the rituals of the power players in the industrial relations boys club.

In an attempt to mystify the topic and help place women's interests on to the restructuring agenda, the Women's Commission in Melbourne held a seminar which was attended by more than 40 women from diverse working backgrounds.

Martina Nighingale, a union education officer, introduced the session by outlining the employers' agenda for award restructuring. After a general discussion of restructuring came up with some perceived advantages and disadvantages for women under the union movement's agenda for award restructuring. It was noted that the need for childcare and flexibility of working hours had not been put on the union's agenda. It was suggested they be placed on a strategy list.

Advantages of Award Restructuring

- Structural barriers on agenda.
- Wage increases for low paid workers

- Potential to change relativities for women.
- Training and career structures on agenda.
- Accrediting women's skills eg clerical work/keyboard.
- Recognition of informal training.
- Recognition of experience.

Implications for women

- Some unions won't apply any creative thought to restructuring.
- Lack of access for women to negotiations.
- Narrow craft interests.
- Part-time/casual/outwork.
- Training should be educational rather than narrowly skills oriented.