

DRAFT JOINT FUSION STATEMENT

Note: it was agreed that this text would be subject to a purely editorial review by Tom O and David G.

The new XXXXXXXXX organisation is the culmination of a fusion of two existing socialist groups, SA and IS.

The existence of the two groups resulted from a split in our common political tendency some years ago. Subsequent developments have led to a narrowing of the differences to the point that organisational unity can be restored. While differences of emphasis remain, we are convinced that they can be resolved on the basis of comradely debate within the one organisation.

The fusion takes place on the basis of mutual respect between two groups who have survived and grown during a difficult political period, rather than on the claim by either side to have been politically vindicated as against the other.

Our tradition

We stand in the tradition of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci and others. This tradition combines a revolutionary opposition to capitalism with a democratic and internationalist conception of socialism. Often summed up in the phrase, "revolutionary socialism from below", this orientation bases itself on the working class as the only group in society which has the power to stop capitalism dead in its tracks, and rebuild society on a new basis. The working class is an international class and can only consolidate its power through the creation of a new, world-wide economic and social system.

Creation of workers' power requires effective revolutionary leadership. That does not mean an elite group attempting to manipulate or hand down power from above, but a mass revolutionary party based among hundreds of thousands of militant workers and controlled democratically by them.

For the militant workers to create such a party, they need to become political leaders, something they can only do by taking up the fight against all forms of oppression in society: sexism, racism, homophobia.

Our tradition rejects opportunism which is prepared to sacrifice the long term needs of the workers and oppressed people in pursuit of short term expediency: this distinguishes us from those who hide or water down their views to gain popularity and influence. At the same time we reject sectarianism which counterposes the needs of a given political group to the actual struggles of those who want to change the world.

Our tradition is also critical. We seek to renew our theories and practices in the light of new experiences and new conditions, and welcome wide ranging debate.

Our times

We are living in times that are difficult for revolutionaries. The great socialist movements that grew up in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have declined. Even the "new left" that emerged at the end of the 1960s has ebbed away. There are three main reasons for this decline, which must be understood by socialists attempting to rebuild the movement.

1. For decades the name of socialism has been associated with bureaucratic dictatorships ruling in such societies as Russia, China, Eastern Europe and a number of third world countries. While the Russian rev initially represented a genuine socialist movement, it remained isolated in a backward country surrounded by hostile powers, and degenerated into a new form of class society. The other "socialist" societies have emulated the stalinist regime that resulted: centrally planned by privileged bureaucrats, politically repressive, driven by economic or military competition with more advanced western rivals to exploit the working class. Thus in the guise of socialism there arose a series of societies that reproduced the key features of capitalism in a new form. We call these societies "state capitalist".

While the state capitalist societies for many years aroused the hopes of people looking for a better world, more recently their reactionary nature has been every more clearly exposed. This has dashed the hopes of millions who believed they represented socialism, and strengthened the hand of socialism's enemies.

We welcome the downfall of the bureaucratic dictatorships in Eastern Europe, and we believe that in time people both there and in the west will discover that they had nothing in common with genuine socialism. Nevertheless, in the short term the so-called "death of socialism" has made the dominant pro-capitalist climate in the west all the more intense.

2. Another claimant to the mantle of socialism has been the Social Democratic and Labor parties, for example in Sweden and to a lesser degree in countries like Britain and Australia. These parties exist to administer capitalism. As the history of the ALP shows, they are prepared to use the forces of the state against workers seeking social change or a better life.

Yet during the long years of relative stability and growth of the capitalist system after World War 2, these parties were able to deliver some reforms which preserved people's faith in their claim to embody a socialist impulse.

Today, governing a crisis-ridden capitalist system, social democratic and Labor parties world wide are presiding over open attacks on workers' living standards and embracing blatant pro-capitalist ideas. In Australia, through the Accord, the ALP has held down our living standards in order to boost employers' profits. Where militant unions stood in their ways, they have been prepared to use the most outrageous union-busting methods, as with the pilots and the BLF.

3. These betrayals would not be so disastrous if there were mass movements fighting for genuine socialist ideas. But while there have been times when sizeable movements fought for politics similar to ours -- the Paris Commune of 1871, the world-wide revolutionary upsurge of the years after World War 1, even to some degree the radical upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s, socialism today is politically isolated.

Partly this is a product of major defeats suffered by the workers' movement, including the triumph of fascism in Europe between the wars and the cold war witch-hunts of the 1950s. More recently, it has been made worse by a climate of political conservatism in society and industrial passivity among workers. We speak of a *downturn* in industrial and political radicalism and struggle which had its roots in the 1970s and was the dominating feature of the 1980s in most industrialised societies.

Our tasks

The tasks of a revolutionary group are propaganda, agitation and organisation.

In the present period we place a central emphasis on arguing for socialist ideas. We see ourselves as building a propaganda group.

A large share of our energies and resources are devoted to our publications, particularly to our paper. We sell this wherever we can find an audience. We hold regularly educational discussions and public forums, and work hard to encourage new people to come along and give our ideas a hearing.

We work especially on campuses as they have a concentration of people which are particularly interested in ideas and open to new ideas.

People on campus are also often interested in being active around particular issues. We relate to them through our routine of selling our publications, meetings, bookstalls, etc and through involvement in struggles, hoping that our theory and our practice will attract them to our organisation.

We work on a similar basis in campaigns and unions, through operating there as revolutionary socialists in the present climate is often not easy.

While we contribute to the building of campaigns and struggles, our primary task is to build and strengthen our own organisation. The key element of this is the education and political development of our members. This is achieved partly through our regular meetings and participation in the organisational work of the group, and partly through intervention in the outside world. It is particularly through the latter that our ideas are tested, strengthened and regenerated.

Our organisation

From this analysis of our role as a "propaganda group", certain organisational consequences flow.

We do not pretend to be a "party," which can lead, or even make a significant difference in winning, the class struggle. While at times socialists can make a difference in particular struggles, our main task is to win small numbers of people to socialism on the basis of our ideas.

This means that education is the most important feature of our internal life. Education involves discussing theory, and discussing our interventions in struggles. Organisational structures are simple, as are membership rules and requirements. And because sound ideas can only develop in a democratic, tolerant and comradesly atmosphere, we are committed to making these essential features of the organisation also.

Looking forward

While others have talked for years about unity on the left, we have made a small, practical step in its realisation. The fusion is an opportunity for more people to join an group that is politically as well as organisationally stronger. We appeal to those who left organised ~~rev~~ politics as a result of the factional tensions of the mid-1980s, the split, and the resulting limitations of both groups, to consider joining us once again. And we appeal to other readers of this statement to consider becoming part of Australia's only national organisation fighting for revolutionary socialism from below.

Muirhead reports, black deaths continue

BLACK DEATHS in custody have been happening for two hundred years. It is grimly appropriate that they became a major public issue during the Bicentennial year of 1988.

Aboriginal activist Bobbi Sykes highlighted the issue in her poem *Ambrose* written in the 1970s:

*There were handmarks
& fingerprints
All over you
When they found you;
But you died
By your own hand
They said.*

The Royal Commission has now been sitting for a year. It's looking at the evidence of the last eight years, during which 434 deaths in custody have been reported. Of these, 103 were black people.

Western Australia comes over as much the most dangerous place to be black. A third of the deaths in custody over the eight year period were in WA, while a quarter were in Queensland. Of the 16 reported since the Commission started, at least five have been in WA.

After a year on the Commission, Justice Muirhead has resigned, leaving behind an Inter-

rim Report. The Report tells us in passing that police particularly enjoy arresting people in certain States.

Queensland tops the national list for overall arrests. In August 1988, the Queensland cops arrested 6500 people all told. That's the highest number in Australia, even though NSW has twice the population.

WA, for its part, has the highest number of arrests per head of population.

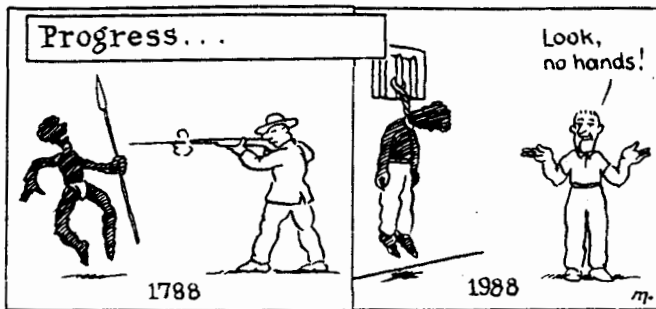
In WA half the Aboriginal people in jail are there for defaulting on fines. Poverty is just another criminal offence.

MUIRHEAD has a lengthy list of recommendations. One is that the offence of drunkenness be abolished in Victoria, Queensland and WA, the other States which still have it.

He declares, presumably on the basis of the charges police chose, that alcohol was involved in two thirds of the arrests that were followed by deaths.

Half the deaths occurred within eight hours of arrest. Muirhead recommends better medical and other attention in watchhouses. But he goes on to point out:

"The explanations for these deaths do not all lie within prison



walls or the confines of lockups, nor are they explicable only in terms of sentencing policies."

The real reason for the deaths is the social oppression of Aborigines, the poverty, harassment and discrimination built into Australian society. When we hear about NSW police taunting Aborigines by offering them football socks, that's just a particularly public example of what goes on all the time.

So where will Muirhead's report go? To State governments who will do as much — or as little — as they like about its 56 recommendations. Police and screws in WA haven't exactly been cooperating with the Commission. They have a policy of giving no statements to it.

The police union, with financial support from the State Labor government, have issued challenges to the validity of the appointments of two commissioners.

THE QUEENSLAND government already has its own report, signed by two Aborigines from Woorabinda and from Cherbourg. That is the "Power-Law Report on the Incidence of Rising Suicides by Aborigines on Queensland Communities Whilst in Custody."

The Royal Commission, while not intending to recommend any prosecutions, is at least careful to point out that it doesn't assume in advance that the deaths were suicides. But it suits the Queensland government to have them all labeled suicide.

The government also likes the Powder-Law recommendations that all blacks should work for the dole to give them self-respect, and that there should be more Community Police (outfitted with cast-off Queensland Police equipment).

Muirhead, while saying more Aboriginal police and screws would be nice, did also mention most black people's "deeply entrenched suspicion of the system" as an obstacle. Some of his statements about the underlying

causes of the deaths touch on the real issues of institutionalised discrimination and racism, but remain mere rhetoric because the Commission has no powers and no teeth.

All it can do is suggest to State governments that they might implement a number of "band-aid" measures.

Muirhead's first four case reports, released on 2 February, have not impressed the black community either. While he found that police and prison officers had mistreated several black prisoners, blaming this for causing at least one death, he rejected claims of foul play.

A LICE DIXON, mother of a 19 year old Kingsley Dixon who was found hanged in Adelaide jail 18 months ago, spoke for many when she remarked:

"I expected some retribution. I expected, not heads to roll, but justice ... It doesn't seem to be happening."

And it won't, not while the social realities that cause Aborigines to make up 15 percent of the prison population, and a quarter of those who die in custody, remain unchanged.

As if to hammer home the point, a few days before Muirhead's case reports were released an Aboriginal man, Greg Karpany, was found hanged in Adelaide's Darlington police station. He was found dead only twenty minutes after being placed in the cells. Lance Walker, a relative and a member of the Committee to Defend Black Rights in Custody, identified the body and found a bruise on the right forehead, a black eye, a red mark on the side of the cheek and bruises on both wrists and upper arms.

Walker had also heard cops saying over the police radio that they were "celebrating" the death.

It will take more than a Royal Commission to destroy the system of oppression that makes such things an everyday reality in modern Australia.

— Carole Ferrier



COVER STORY

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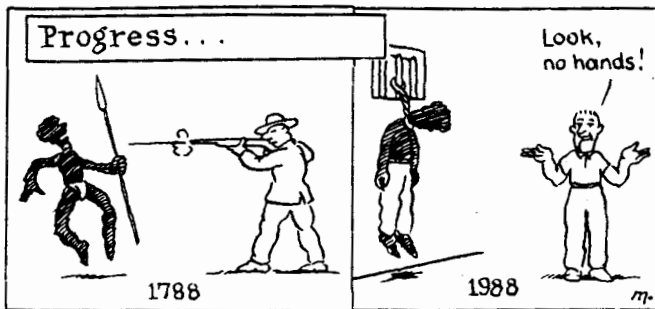
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