

*DEMOCRACY  
FOR WHOM ?*

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BY E. F. HILL

There is a lot of talk in the daily press of democracy. Judges have made public statements about "the rule of law." One of them has spoken favourably of the right to dissent. He said that many people in history had assisted progress by breaking a law. But he said the law ought to be obeyed and it was only in very exceptional circumstances that dissent to the point of disobedience to the law could be permitted. The other judge said that dissent to the point of disobedience was not correct. (" . . . open defiance of the law is anti-social . . . it corrodes the rule of law". He said success over the by-law might encourage similar behaviour elsewhere).

All this arose over the repeal by the Melbourne City Council of the by-law which prohibited street distribution of leaflets. This by-law was repealed after the big business men in charge of the City Council adamantly refused to repeal it. When the Council did repeal it the press throughout Australia hailed it as a great victory for democracy. Dr. J. F. Cairns congratulated the Council on its action.

The repeal occurred because a large number of workers and students (particularly the latter) had steadfastly defied it. Many had been fined. Others had been gaoled. All this had gone on for a long time. They won a wonderful victory. They showed themselves unafraid of sacrifice and full of determination. Nothing can tarnish their image.

Because such a lot was made of this victory for democracy it is necessary to think carefully about just what happened and what follows.

The by-law was undoubtedly repealed because young people particularly had taken the law into their own hands and openly defied the authorities. Without these actions it would still be there. It is impossible to praise their actions too highly.

But there were other very important factors in its repeal. They, too, should be closely examined.

The whole struggle really arose out of opposition to the war in Vietnam and to conscription. Since that war began, opposition to it has mounted throughout the world. Very influential and important sections of big business now oppose it not for any reason other than it does not serve their immediate financial interests. They see too that it cannot be won. Accordingly they are prepared to tolerate, and in a mild sense, encourage, people's opposition to the war. On the other hand, the common people really oppose the war from their hearts.

Their opposition is quite correct.

This section of capitalist opinion played its part in tolerating and even mildly encouraging opposition to the Vietnam war and also to this by-law that was being used to stifle that opposition. Thus quite a while before the by-law in Melbourne was repealed, sections of the press were suggesting that it be repealed. Shortly before it was repealed the same sections of the press openly demanded that it be repealed. They did it in the name of democracy.

## HOW YOU LOOK AT IT

Democracy is a very important thing. But it depends on how you look at it. These sections of the press have never, never been champions of democracy for the people. They have been the champions of repression. They all sing a hymn of hate against workers on strike, against any sort of struggle that affects their own vital interests.

But in this case they became great champions of democracy.

And why?

One reason we have given.

Still another is that "democracy" and the pretence that we live in a democracy, is very very important to Australia's rulers. They need it for deception. This way they can preserve the status quo. Capitalist democracy which is the

political framework which houses the capitalist system, skilfully sets out to maintain that system. If you can persuade the ordinary people that those ordinary people really have a say in their own destiny then you can get away with anything. It is much more comfortable for the capitalists to maintain this pretence and to rule by "democracy."

Thus on this matter people who are really violent enemies of democracy for the people (and in fact base their whole system on real violence and not on democracy), came out as great champions of democracy.

They repealed the by-law.

But their repeal of the by-law had no serious implications for them at all. At least to some degree it simply fitted in with their own ideas. In other words they made virtue of necessity. They were faced with an ever growing campaign in a world climate favoring that campaign. They themselves, for their own selfish reasons, were not too enthusiastic about the war. Thus they made a great "democratic" issue of their repeal. It was a great victory for democracy! It showed that the people's will can prevail! The very argument and the very claims show how unusual such a victory is. This example was used to demonstrate democracy at work. Can you remember any other such example?

If you can, then it is certain that it would be on a matter as inconsequential as this by-law. The capitalists gave away their by-law because it was of no very great importance to them. Being of no very great importance it was easy to give away and easy to capitalise heavily in propaganda about democracy.

Moreover the whole thing threatened to get out of hand. Failure to give way meant that the authorities were helping the young people to learn, and quickly at that, the real content of the much vaunted democratic system. Their knowledge would soon be passing from the stage of slogans about the archaic laws and even the Vietnam war to query the basic nature of the whole system.



Retention of the by-law involved greater potential threat to their system of law and order than its repeal.

You will remember that in repealing the by-law these great champions of democracy said that there were ample laws to deal with litter, obstruction, sedition, defamation, other breaches of the Crimes Act and so on. So even on their own ground these gentlemen were shown to keep their powder dry.

The truth is they are not champions of democracy at all. They are champions of a host of repressive laws; they are champions of force and violence; they are champions of their own wealth and power against the ordinary people.

But they are not fools. They constantly discuss their tactics of struggle.

In the by-law dispute, it suited them much better to follow the tactic of bending with the wind. They repealed the by-law and became great champions of democracy. They appeared to make a generous concession. One of them even made a self-criticism.

## **NOTHING HAS CHANGED**

If we take this gentleman, Nathan by name, who made the self-criticism (and he is only small fry in the capitalist world) what do we find? He remains the owner of Paterson's Stores and the local nominee of the gigantic Courage brewery. Nothing has changed in that. Is it likely that this gentleman really now believes in democracy for the people? Few will believe it.

Then, too, it was said by these same people that we need not worry too much. As soon as the by-law is repealed the romanticism of disobeying it will disappear and no more leaflets will be distributed. Such is their cynicism!

Throughout Australia (and indeed throughout the so-called western world) the capitalist class is sorely pressed.



All sorts of struggles of the people are going on. The social system is really falling apart. For the first time in history students on a world-wide scale will not obey their teachers and the authorities. Workers and working people are showing great determination in struggle. On the other hand, the difficulties of the great imperialist powers and the lesser capitalist powers greatly intensify. The U.S. has suffered calamity in Vietnam. The British rulers are in very deep economic, political and military difficulty. France and Italy are in turmoil. So it goes on. Australia, tied particularly to the U.S.A., shares the difficulties of that country. Far from this crisis abating, it is intensifying. Young people particularly reflect this crisis very accurately in their minds. And they do something about it. They rebel. Their rebellion cannot be controlled. It spreads to all sections of the people. It is directed against the evils of the social system. It carries with it the threat of total overthrow of capitalism.

The capitalists too know their own difficulties. They realise their situation is extremely difficult. They realise that their social system is under acute challenge. They sense that they must carefully study their tactics to withstand the challenge. "It must be borne in mind that the bourgeois parties . . . constantly discuss their tactics of struggle."

## **DECEPTION BEST TACTIC**

The best tactic is that of deception. Deceive the people so that they think they rule, that the people think they really control their own destiny. For centuries this deception has held sway. People have not awakened to the deception.

But today they are awakening. Deception still has great sway. Democracy has infinite appeal. The deception of democracy has not yet run its course. It still has a slight reserve.

Thus our capitalist rulers exploit this reserve. They try to breathe new life into it. Accordingly in the name of democracy they make a great deal of repealing this by-law.

Not only do they do this but they involve in their campaign of deception their reserves. They have been at great pains over many years, to build up Dr. J. F. Cairns as a "left" leader. Dr. Cairns is painted as the key "left" leader in the labor party. In the case of the by-law, Dr. Cairns was used to come forward at various stages of the campaign as the champion of the struggling students. On the eve of the repeal of the by-law, Dr. Cairns ostentatiously had himself "arrested" (in fact he was never arrested: it was all a pretence). Still the press spoke of his arrest; spoke of how serious the situation was when a senior labor parliamentarian was arrested etc. etc. And when the by-law was under severe challenge Dr. Cairns said that those opposed to it must oppose the sitting councillors at the next election. When it was repealed he congratulated the Council and spoke of the great victory for democracy. That is, Dr. Cairns advocated the farce of participating in an election as a solution, or challenging the by-law in the Courts — anything to head off struggle. The truth is, of course, that the young people on the streets, and not Dr. Cairns had won the victory. The methods of struggle had nothing in common with measured arguments through the courts. Victory came though outright defiance of the law.

Then those whom we call revisionists, that is, those who call themselves Communists but who have taken all the revolution out of it, come out as great champions of democracy. They keep on talking of democracy and the victory for democracy in the repeal of this by-law. You can see how all these people sing a song of democracy. Democracy, democracy, democracy and still more democracy, they say.

This repeal of the by-law is not the only triumph of this "democracy". University authorities have relaxed their

repressive rules against students, have given students "more say." The hue and cry against school students who have dared, and still dare, to publish rebellious newspapers have died down. Again the capitalist rulers bend with the wind. They talk again about democracy, democracy ad nauseam.

In our opinion, all this is sheer humbug and deception. Nobody should be deceived by it for one minute.

Its aim is to divert the struggle of the people. The capitalists make little concessions on relatively unimportant questions so as to gain political capital for themselves and to let workers and students "blow off steam."

## NO DEMOCRACY IN ABSTRACT

The workers and students have had very very important victories (because at heart the capitalists never want to concede anything) but they should not be deceived by the tricks of the enemy over whom they have had their victories.

Democracy is a grand word.

But it is a word that can only be understood as a matter concerning social classes, of class struggle. Democracy for whom? is the question. There is freedom of the press but who other than the monopolists has the means to run a daily newspaper? And any other democratic right can be tested in a similar way.

There is democracy to own a huge factory. There is freedom to exploit workers. There is freedom to work in the factories and be exploited. But in fact where does this democratic right get you? The fact is that Australia is owned lock, stock and barrel by U.S. monopolies, British monopolies and a few local monopolies. It is they who rule. It is they who wage war in Vietnam, who impose conscription.

On any question that really threatens them they call out their police, they use the army, they use the courts, they use the gaols. Even in this they get up to all sorts of



cunning tricks. It is all done in the name of preserving democracy, in the name of the rule of law. In the courts you are not charged with opposing the war in Vietnam. You are charged with riot or obstruction or hindering a policeman in the execution of his duty. "Oh no", say our prosecutors and judges, "we are not concerned with the war in Vietnam nor conscription, we are concerned only with your breach of the law. Vietnam and conscription are quite irrelevant." What utter humbug and hypocrisy! The mask should be torn right off this. Then when Zarb and others are sentenced to two years gaol, again the Vietnam war and conscription are irrelevant according to this particular trick. All our prosecutors, judges, army, police, gaols, are concerned with is your particular breach of the law. More humbug, hypocrisy and trickery.

## CRITICAL WEAPON IS FORCE

Do not be tricked by democracy. There can be no real democracy for the people while the great factories and the land are owned by a handful of rich monopolists who exploit the rest of the people. No matter how much formal democracy there is, U.S. domination and Australia's satellite position, will continue and intensify. It is quite correct to fight for democratic rights but not as ends in themselves.

They must be fought for to unite the people in the struggle on the key issues on which the capitalists deny democracy. The capitalists beat up students and workers, gaol them, conscript them in order to prosecute aggression in Vietnam, in order to intensify exploitation in Australia. Struggle against the root cause of the trouble — the social system itself is what is required. All struggles must have that aim. They must not stop halfway.

The critical weapon of the capitalists is force, is fascism. Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of big business. Democracy under capitalism is only the deceptive cloak of capitalist force. There is in Australia plenty of evidence of

this force. Many people are in gaol for political offences, many people are coerced by force into the army to fight in Vietnam, workers' leaders in struggle are thrown into gaol, police violence multiplies, secret police are strengthened, "riot squad" training is intensified, gas and firearms are used more and more, the army is geared for suppressing civilian "revolt," gangs of fascist thugs are brought into being. All this is fascism. "Democracy" so called is not explained for the people. It is contracting. Force is expanding.

Do not be under any illusion. Force cannot be met by "democracy" (rather one should say the illusion of democracy). "Democracy" won't help you against policemen armed with batons and guns. All over the world the oppressed people are finding the appropriate ways to resist this fascist violence.

