

General strike now to defeat Fraser!

Australasian SPARTACIST



NUMBER 26

25 NOVEMBER 1975

TEN CENTS

Kerr calls elections to prepare crackdown on unions

Whitlam/Hawke sabotage workers' defence

The sacking of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam by the Governor-General on 11 November has induced a general political crisis that has shaken postwar capitalist rule in Australia more than at any time since the fall of the Chifley government. Sir John Kerr used the supposedly moribund "reserve powers of the Crown" in an unprecedented violation of the long-standing tradition that the party with a majority in the House of Representatives forms the government. This severely undermined the credibility of parliament in the eyes of the masses and thereby gave an enormous impetus to the working-class upsurge which first greeted the deferral of supply by the Senate, bringing about the political intervention of the working class on a mass scale.

At the heart of the matter is not the constitutional debate which has flared up over the propriety of Kerr's "legal coup d'etat", but the desire of the ruling class to see the labour movement brought to heel and the response of the working class which has rallied to the defence of the Labor Government against the Liberal power play. The Constitution has become an important class issue only as a secondary factor, and insofar as Kerr's action has divided bourgeois opinion. It is such a division which forms the basis of Whitlam's main line of defence. He pleads that his interpretation of the Constitution, by defending the principle of "stable government", is the one which best serves the interests of capitalism, receiving the support of bourgeois elements like Senator Steele Hall and ex-Liberal Prime Minister John Gorton.

Clearly Kerr's action was deliberately calcu-

lated to resolve the deadlock over the budget bills decisively in favour of Fraser and the bosses' parties. But even though there is clear evidence that Kerr conspired secretly with Fraser to dump Whitlam, it took even the bourgeoisie largely by surprise. Kerr's move was not designed to install a "dictator", in spite of a lot of nonsense propagated to this effect by demagogues and phrase-mongers in the labour movement. It was not a move towards Bonapartism but towards a stronger bourgeois-democratic state, intended not to supersede parliament but to use limited Bonapartist methods to redirect bourgeois democracy. That is why the purpose of this "legal coup d'etat" was to force an election -- a strange move for a dictatorship -- which the Liberals had figured they would win. The bourgeoisie is not (yet) out to smash parliament but to bring wages under control and bring in a (parliamentary) government more to their taste.

The main instrument of Fraser's planned attack on the unions is to be the introduction of new penal powers based on the machinery of the Arbitration system. Fraser's new strikebreaking laws pose an immediate danger to all workers, but they are inseparable from the whole Arbitration system, and a consistent fight against Fraser's union bashing requires its complete destruction, root and branch.

While they are not the fundamental question, the institutions of the Senate and Governor-General have been thoroughly brought into the class struggle by Kerr's "coup". Even in bourgeois terms, the dismissal of Whitlam was grossly undemocratic, regardless of its legality. The

Senate and Governor-General, as institutional "checks" designed to keep Parliament from getting out of hand, are not even in line with consistent bourgeois democracy, and they must be abolished -- but not because this would change the basic character of Parliament as a tool of bourgeois class rule. On the contrary: the fullest democracy under capitalism is only useful in providing the best conditions for fighting to overthrow the entire capitalist system, including its parliamentary fraud.

Furthermore, Sir John Kerr's unilateral strengthening of the heretofore latent arbitrary power of Governor-General carries with it a tendency within Parliament towards Bonapartism which cannot be allowed to stand. Nipping it in the bud would be a victory for the working class, but one which would pose the immediate need to go further by challenging the legitimacy of bourgeois institutions. Military or fascist dictatorship can never be prevented by legalisms but only by successful workers' revolution!

The sacking of Whitlam was immediately answered by a wave of strikes and demonstrations by the most militant workers in a number of industries, particularly maritime and (in Melbourne) metal workers. Even "moderate" Waterside Workers' Federation leader Fitzgibbon talked about a 24-hour general strike -- in the face of the ACTU president Bob Hawke's pleas for workers to "cool it". In spite of tremendous resistance from the central union bureaucracy, the bureaucrats were forced to call a four-hour general stoppage in Melbourne on 14 November in which

Continued on page two



Rally in support of the Labor Party, Hyde Park, Sydney, 13 November.

ASP Photo

... workers' defence

400,000 workers walked off and a mass rally of at least 30,000 filled Melbourne's City Square. The thrust of this response was defence of the Labor Government. Nothing could prove more sharply the role of the Labor Party as a bourgeois workers' party and the importance of its meaning to the working class, based on its roots in the unions, as a party of the class.

The wage freeze desired by the bosses; the Labor reformists' attempts to impose it through the fraudulent wage indexation scheme; Fraser's threat to impose it through brute force; unemployment which continues to grow; the threat posed by the arbitrary power of the Governor-General and its use to oust Labor; workers' support for the Labor Party as the mass workers' party against the bosses' parties -- these are the issues which require an urgent response by the labour movement to defend the basic interests of the working class. These attacks can be successfully defeated only by the organised power of the labour movement to bring the system to a halt. That is why the ACTU must call a general strike now. The continuing outpouring of working-class anger shows that such decisive action would receive enthusiastic support. Without a resolute stand now, the working class will be exposed to even sharper attacks. *For an immediate general strike organised by the ACTU to kick Fraser out and restore the Labor Government! Smash the indexation wage freeze and Labor budget cuts! Abolish the arbitration system! For an immediate 35-hour week at full pay for all workers and a full, unconditional cost-of-living adjustment to all wages!*

But the working class is being prevented from acting by the privileged fakery who bureaucratically run the ALP and the unions. Desperate to maintain their position as agents of the capitalists within the labour movement, the bureaucracy headed by Whitlam and Hawke have from the start been frantically trying to prevent any strikes at all, urging workers instead to donate a day's pay to ALP election funds! Hawke prefers the working class to take whatever the ruling class deals out lying down. This grovelling defeatism assumes the battle is lost before it is begun. The reformists openly admit that capitalism can be "saved" only at the expense of the workers. But that is precisely why capitalism must be overthrown.

The bureaucrats have so far successfully quashed moves for a general strike -- the NSW Labor Council managed to prevent even a four-hour protest stoppage to allow workers to attend the Labor Council's own rally! This sabotage has already produced a prevalent mood of waiting for the elections, as can be expected when workers are confronted with the complete refusal of the leadership to act. Their ability to do so has been greatly enhanced by the role of the left wing of the bureaucracy, and especially the reformist Communist Party of Australia (CPA). The CPA's union bureaucrats refused to call for a general strike, hiding behind meaningless phrases about fighting in the factories and the streets. At most, they supported stoppages of 24 hours or less -- purely token measures. Thus the CPA raised the slogan not for a general strike but a "national stoppage", not decisive action but a mere protest.

Of course *Tribune* will admit the abstract possibility of a general strike -- but never to win anything! "A general strike would enable workers ... to make their demands heard. It would influence [!] the present political crisis

and could open the way for more fundamental social change." The CPA is interested not in fighting capitalism but merely in a slightly more left ALP, and attempts to misdirect working-class action into *renewed faith* in the reformist hierarchy -- "put the Labor government back and force it to adopt policies which express the people's demands" -- when the vital task is to destroy the authority of the ALP tops!

"It is not only a fight to defend democracy ... but to *extend* it," says *Tribune* (29 October) -- shades of the Stalinists' "advanced democracy" whose results can be seen in Chile today. The CPA wants to subordinate workers' struggle to a multi-class political bloc of "all democrats" to defend *bourgeois* democracy. This pathetic class collaboration has been given body by the CPA-backed "People's Action Coalition" in Sydney.

The Socialist Workers League (SWL) has revealed itself again as the pseudo-Trotskyist mini-version of the CPA. For exactly one week these reformists called for a general strike -- and then they dropped it. The reason? The SWL had only bothered to raise the call because the labour bureaucrats were making noises about it. When the bureaucrats had succeeded in sabotaging it, the SWL heaved a sigh of relief. And as far as the SWL was concerned, the main value of a general strike would be to "allow every worker to actively participate in the mass rallies that will be necessary in the coming campaign" (*Direct Action*, November 13)! The SWL sees the entire political crisis only as a boost to their reformist election campaign, itself largely confined to democratic demands, which the SWL hopes will pressure the ALP reformists to the left.

In its initial response to the budget crisis, the fake-Trotskyist Communist League (CL) called for a general strike to "smash the Senate". At a time when it is crucial for revolutionists to bring to the fore the class issues *underlying* the "constitution" debate, the CL instead presented the main issue as the Constitution! The CL cannot however be accused of consistency. Now the *Militant* headlines a general strike to "smash Fraser's dictatorship". The CL, for all its extravagant fantasy that Fraser has totally crushed parliamentary democracy, claims that the advantage in a general strike, if victorious, is that it "is the surest way of ensuring a Labor government while at the same time giving the working class the necessary confidence to [wait for it!] demand of such a government that it implement a program that would end unemployment, reduce inflation, increase wages and social services etc" (*Militant*, 24 November)! A general strike to "smash a dictatorship" means civil war and insurrection. This is what the CL calls for -- in order to pressure the Labor Government just a little to the left!

Unable to maintain even a modicum of consistency, the same *Militant* elsewhere calls for a general strike to "smash those sacred 'parliamentary institutions', that 'democracy' and that 'Constitution' which has resulted in the overthrow of the [Whitlam] Government ...", forgetting that according to the CL Fraser has smashed these already.

From the beginning of the crisis the SL has called for a *defensive* general strike -- one with the initial aims of halting a series of immediate threats -- because, as everyone knows, the political prerequisites simply do not exist for a working-class seizure of power. On the other hand the general strike is a revolutionary means of struggle which not only paralyses the bourgeoisie but requires workers to begin taking over certain state functions and leads quickly to violent clashes with the armed forces of the state. It inevitably develops in the *direction* of a revolutionary confrontation.

But to move from the defence to the offence, the working class needs a resolute leadership and the organisation to carry out the fight. The present misleaders will be fighting to defeat a general strike, but the working class has not yet broken from them. By posing the aims of the general strike in defensive terms dictated by the objective situation and understandable now to broad layers of the working class, the general strike call is a powerful means of setting the base against the top. And until the reformist traitors have been finally discredited in the fight for a revolutionary leadership, this is the central task of the revolutionary vanguard. On the other hand, to pose the question of seizing state power at this time means a belief either that Whitlam and Hawke can be *pressured* into overthrowing the capitalist system, or that this can be done spontaneously over the head of the recognised leadership of the labour movement.

The oscillation of the cynical fake-Trotskyist charlatans of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) is curious. When the Liberals first made clear their intention to block supply, *Workers News* was crying "Call the Election on Socialist Policies" (*Workers News*, 30 October). Now, after Kerr has obligingly called the election, they don't want it: "But to accept an election on these terms is to accept the right of the capitalist state to dictatorially determine how long a Government

elected by the working class should be allowed to rule!" (*Workers News*, 13 November). However, their call for "Labor to fight the election on [unspecified] socialist policies" is retained to show the kind of government the SLL fights for -- a parliamentary Labor Government with a left face.

Workers News (17 November) denounces as "idealist" our statement that "A general strike cannot at this point directly challenge bourgeois rule without an overwhelming likelihood of defeat" (*ASP* supplement, 13 November). The SLL "forget" to complete the quotation from our leaflet, which unlike *Workers News*' empty rhetoric shows how a general strike in the present situation can in fact help open the road to a successful insurrection: "But by successfully defending the working class, by beginning the organisation of its ranks and preparing the way for factory committees and workers councils as an alternative to the bourgeois state [a general strike] will create better conditions for successful struggle."

By contrast the SLL, which never mentions factory or shop committees or any form of soviets, in calling for an insurrectionary general strike now, without the necessary political and organisational weapons, in fact call for the smashing of the working class.

This is so particularly given the SLL's real *orgy* of crawling idealism as *Workers News* pledges to the ruling class that their general strike to "smash the dictatorship" will be *peaceful*! "The SLL ... has not at any time advocated violence in the fight against the Fraser dictatorship" (*Workers News*, 17 November)! And they protest that "A general strike is not 'violence' or 'terrorism', but the legitimate [?!] use of industrial strength by the working class..." (*Workers News*, 21 November)! In line with this simpering, the SLL manages to pose (in the abstract only) even the arming of the workers in a reformist manner: "Disband the Regular Army and the Army reserve and replace it with workers militias drawn from and responsible to the trade union movement" (*Workers News*, 21 November). And who will do this? The bourgeois state, or perhaps Labor elected on "socialist policies"?

It is not enough to stop Fraser. The immediate demands which must be raised by a general strike as outlined above can only be a temporary defence of working-class interests; the current political crisis is but a part of the whole struggle of the working class for state power. The political crisis is living proof of the need for the Trotskyist *transitional program*. A *sliding scale of hours* is needed to maintain full employment with no loss in pay by sharing the available work. The "capital strike" by the bosses who refuse to invest because their ill-gotten profits are not high enough, the "right" of the bosses to sack or speed up workers as they see fit, cannot be accepted. Their stranglehold on society must be broken by taking industry out of their hands. *Open the books of the corporations! Workers control of hiring! Nationalise basic industry and financial institutions under workers' control -- no compensation!*

The common feature of all the pseudo-revolutionary left groupings is the failure to pose concretely the question of workers power. The expropriation of the capitalist class and the leap to planned production for social needs will never be carried out by a capitalist parliamentary government run by the Labor Party but only by an alternative government of workers' organisations. In the context of the political strike movement and the need for a general strike, which can only be organised on the basis of the existing trade unions, this can be concretely posed in such a way as to link up with present class consciousness only by the demand: *for an ALP/ACTU government pledged to expropriate the capitalist class!*

The political crisis and the ferment within the working class puts organisations and programs claiming to provide a revolutionary strategy to a ruthless test. The crisis of proletarian leadership has been starkly posed. There is a crying need for a revolutionary alternative. The Spartacist League, and it alone, has put forward the analysis and program forged and tested in the class struggle and representing the accumulated experience of past generations of proletarian struggle, but our size and authority are small and no alternative leadership capable of seriously challenging the hegemony of the ALP reformists now stands before the class. However, as the treachery of the opportunist groupings to the left of the ALP is exposed, honest revolutionary fighters in these organisations will recognise them as obstacles to the revolution and search for an alternative. On the order of the day is the hard political combat to split the revolutionary elements from the opportunist organisations, and their regroupment through fusions based on principled agreement into a single Leninist combat organisation, a section of a reborn Fourth International. This is the essential task facing Marxists today on the road to the mass Australian revolutionary workers party. ■

Australasian SPARTACIST 

a monthly organ of revolutionary Marxism for the rebirth of the Fourth International published by Spartacist Publications for the Central Committee of the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand, section of the international Spartacist tendency

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: One dollar for the next twelve issues (one year).

AUSTRALASIAN SPARTACIST is registered at the GPO, Sydney for posting as a newspaper - Category C.

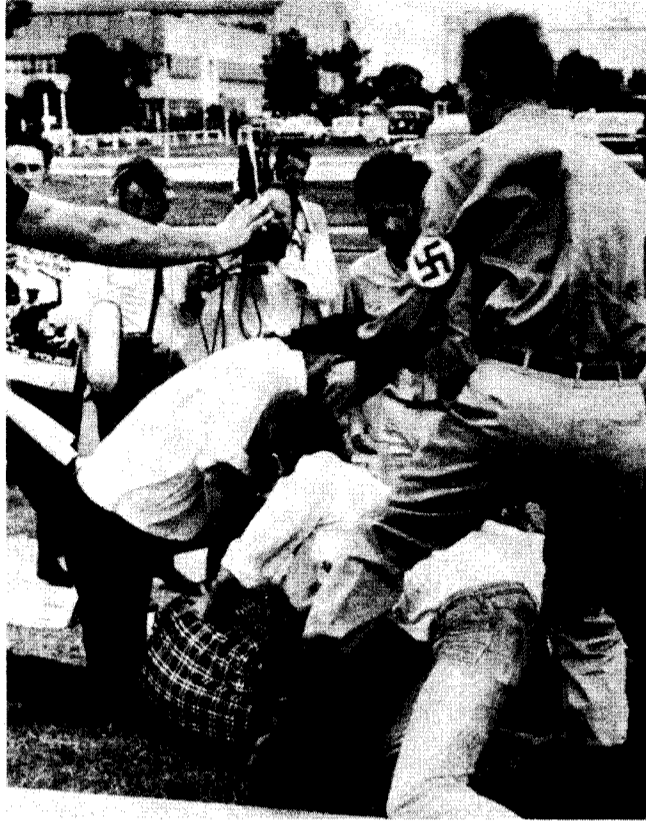
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The Fraser government:

Fascists or "democratic" union bashers?

In the past weeks there has been much talk of "coup d'etats", "putsches" and "dictatorships". At rallies and demonstrations protesting Whitlam's dismissal the Nazi swastika has become symbolic for the Fraser government and speakers have grimly evoked "similarities" in the present situation to Germany in the 1930s and pre-coup Chile.

Capitalism is a dictatorship, the dictatorship of a class; the bourgeoisie own and control the



Nazis, anti-apartheid demonstrators clash, Mascot, 1970.

social wealth and have at their disposal the whole repressive apparatus of the state. They will be prepared to go to any lengths to preserve their rule. But dependent on the level of class struggle, the bourgeoisie can exercise their dictatorship in different forms; in "democratic" capitalist countries like Australia with a history of relative class peace it is hidden behind the sham of parliamentary democracy.

In the epoch of imperialist decay of capitalism the rule of the bourgeoisie and its preferred framework of government are historically obsolescent. Explosive class tensions constantly threaten to tear the inherently unstable basis of parliamentary democracy apart, the traditional parties teeter on the edge of disintegration and inevitably the bourgeoisie is faced with the choice of either fascist dictatorship or proletarian revolution. But at every stage leading up to that ultimate choice, a correct appraisal of the actual situation is crucial to a revolutionary policy.

Bourgeois democracy will exist as long as the level of class struggle allows because it is useful to the ruling class -- both as a forum for bourgeois policy-making and as a "democratic" deception of the masses to restrain class struggle. To speak of a "dictatorship" (counterposed, of course, to "normal" "democracy") in the present political crisis allows for the most dangerous errors that can only leave the working class politically unarmed for the decisive clashes ahead. However, as class tensions increase and can no longer be contained within "democratic" forms, finance capital seeks a strongman to arbitrate in its interests. Usually found outside the "normal" government institutions, with a base in the police/military/bureaucracy of the state, the function of such strongmen is to restore "order". Marxists characterise these "dictatorships" of *individuals* or *cliques* such as a military junta as *Bonapartist* regimes, forms of bourgeois political and class rule which in this epoch are either transitional to fascism or fulfill its function of terrorising the working class. Fascism itself does this job of destroying the proletarian organisations for the bourgeoisie through the mass mobilisation of the despairing and rootless petty bourgeoisie, supplemented from the lumpen proletariat. As Leon Trotsky, writing after the victory of fascism in Germany, pointed out, "it would be unpardonable ... to convert Bonapartism and fascism into logically incompatible categories." ("Bonapartism and Fascism", *Writings, 1934-35, p 55*)

The ALP reformists maintain that the present Fraser "caretaker" government is a "dictatorship" taking Australia completely outside the bourgeois-democratic political framework, and in this

they have the full support of the reformist Communist Party of Australia (CPA), the Stalinist Socialist Party of Australia (SPA), the Maoist Stalinists and even the fake-Trotskyists of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and the Communist League (CL). And why? Because the imposition of the Fraser government was "illegal" and/or "undemocratic". Firstly, it is quite clear that Kerr's actions were formally "legal"; this is however beside the point. Bourgeois democracy and its constitution have all sorts of loopholes to allow for the emergence of Bonapartism or its episodic application -- eg the "state of emergency". But true Bonapartism arises when the level of class struggle demands an *end* to rule by traditional methods, and its observance of legal formalities will not make it any the less Bonapartist. Hitler's coming to power was, after all, initially "legal" in form, but the question was decided not in the juridical superstructure but by Hitler's stormtroopers in the streets.

Improbable Fuehrers and cynical Healyites

Nor does the undemocratic nature of Whitlam's dismissal make Fraser a dictator. The bourgeois constitution, designed to maintain the rule of a small minority, is far from democratic, so it is hardly surprising that its application by the ruling class is "undemocratic". The Fraser government, whilst temporarily in power through the use of limited Bonapartist powers of the Australian bourgeois democratic system, remains *essentially* within the confines of that system. That is the meaning of the conditions set on the caretaker government, most especially the stipulation to hold an immediate general election. It is of course conceivable that Fraser could discard these conditions and exercise untrammelled Bonapartist rule, but this is highly unlikely, even for Fraser, who is dependent on the Liberal/National Country Party machine for his position; and *at this point* it would be opposed by the bourgeoisie itself.

The SLL's paper *Workers News* (17 November 1975) attacks as treacherous the Spartacist League's statement that "Fraser is no Hitler or Pinochet -- he is at worst just another Menzies" (*Australasian Spartacist* supplement, 13 November). It is the SLL that is helping prepare a bloodbath by its cynical deceit that the mass murder of the Chilean proletariat is no worse than Malcolm Fraser's parliamentary manoeuvres! The Bonapartist *elements* within bourgeois democracy and Bonapartist dictatorship or fascism are not the same thing. The Liberal/National Country Party coalition, a bourgeois menage ranging from reactionary diehards to "progressive liberals", has its tradition and roots in decades of parliamentary democracy. When it decides to go beyond parliament the bourgeoisie will almost certainly require a new leadership, either outside of or by splitting the traditional parties.

"Every bourgeois democracy bears the features of Bonapartism. ... But the art in scientific thinking is to determine where precisely quantity changes into a new quality." (Leon Trotsky, "Again on the Question of Bonapartism", *Writings, 1934-35, p 208*)

The Maoist Stalinists and their front groups for "Australian independence" on the other hand believe that fascism (for them Liberals are "fascists") is already in power! But where is the evidence? There is no extra-parliamentary rightist mobilisation, no significant fascist gangs. There have been no restrictions beyond the usual on workers' rights to assemble, demonstrate and organise -- all political parties of the workers movement are still legal and Fraser has made no move to ban them.

If, in fact, bourgeois democracy had been destroyed and the reactionary legions on the march, the *immediate* task of the revolutionary vanguard would be to lead, by whatever means possible, in the *immediate* arming of the workers and the formation of workers' militias. But nowhere have any of these "dictator" and "fascist" mongers raised such demands, clearly demonstrating their utter inability to prepare the working class for any real right-wing threat. Maoists talk of the need to "prepare in all ways" to fight fascism but in reality their trade-union leaders like Gallagher and Bull, far from organising workers' militias, carry on "business as usual" in the union bureaucracy.

The ballot versus the bullet?

For reformists, talk of "dictatorship" is purely demagogic, designed to head off criticism from the left. The ALP leaders have appealed to the working class to exercise "restraint"; the "coup", the "rape of democracy" must be fought through the ballot-box!! Hawke claims the ALP has the "case" to go to the people. Parliamentary democracy, supposedly destroyed by the "Fraser/Kerr coup" will be restored through rational debate and elections, organised by courtesy of the "dictatorship"!

The CPA's *Tribune* (19 November) claims there is a real possibility that Fraser might call in the army if the elections look like going against him. Fortunately there will probably be more time to prepare for serious resistance to such a confrontation *which is inevitable at some point*. But this preparation is exactly what the CPA obstructs with its agitation for "democracy", which is not for a *military* bloc against a right-wing coup but a *political* bloc with the liberal bourgeoisie ("all democrats") to maintain democratic illusions.

The fake-Trotskyist SLL and CL have called for a general strike to oust the Fraser "dictatorship"; but to call for a general strike to oppose armed dictatorship, and *not* to make as the central agitational demand the arming of the workers and the formation of workers' militias, is to call for mass butchery of the working class. But for the SLL, whose mentors in Britain after its first police raid pledged to the bourgeoisie its opposition "*in principle*" to terrorism (our emphasis) and promised to immediately expel any member found in possession of guns, such cowardly betrayal is scarcely surprising. And so the SLL, with a touching faith in the Fraser "dictatorship", in reality believes along with the Labor reformists and most people that elections will be called on December 13. In fact one of its central slogans is "Labor must fight the election on socialist policies"!

In the 1930s the German Stalinists labelled the Breuning/Papen/Schleicher Bonapartist governments as "fascist" and politically disarmed the working class to the real fascists mobilised in the streets. Similarly to turn a reactionary bourgeois democrat like Fraser into a "fascist" is to dress up fascism as nothing special, a deception designed to lead the masses to the conclusion that there is no special need to fight the murderous scum when they really do begin to mobilise. There is no qualitative difference between Whitlam and Fraser once they are ensconced at the head of administration of the capitalist state -- both stand pledged to the preservation of capitalist rule. The assorted reformists and centrists, clinging to the skirts of the liberal bourgeoisie and parliamentarism, use the rhetoric of "dictatorship" and "fascism" to cover their opportunist appetites to adapt to the labour bureaucracy and capitulate before bourgeois democracy. This is a recipe for disaster. ■

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The bourgeois press and the working class

Censorship is not the way!

Outrage at the blatant political bias of the bourgeoisie's press, coupled with the parliamentarist fear of its effects on electoral results, recently led a large section of Sydney's aspirant left, despite a mask of radical militancy, to express in demonstrations on 13 and 15 November their pervasive faith in the capitalist state. The confrontation outside the offices of Murdoch's "News Limited" (Australian-Mirror-Telegraph) group after the Thursday 13 November ALP support rally had some success in restricting the circulation of the Daily Mirror.

The fake-Trotskyist Communist League, which participated unceremoniously, and Socialist Labour

at News Limited had certainly expressed at least vague opposition to the editorial bias, calling for "evenhandedness". The Owens-Pringle demonstration organisers, until the last few minutes of the four-and-a-half hour demonstration, claimed that they were working closely with the workforce in the plant. The latter, they assured the demonstrators, would stop, meet with demonstrators, and decide after seeing the first edition of the Sunday Mirror whether to stop later editions coming out on the trucks. But no meeting was to occur, and the organisers had to tell their followers to go home, having achieved nothing.

power, the bosses will find ways to push their propaganda. Until the means of communication can be taken out of the bosses' hands entirely, the way to fight the bourgeois press is to develop the working-class press.

Of course, the working class must defend its rights against direct assault by fascist thugs, including the incitement of such assaults -- no free speech for these murderous gangsters! But any other restrictions on democratic rights under capitalism will invariably be turned against the working class. In some cases, the bourgeois state may pretend to side with the workers as an excuse for obtaining editorial control of the press. With Fraser in power, it is far more likely to use its armed forces to defend Murdoch. In either case, the working class stands to lose. News Limited workers cannot by themselves take on and defeat the capitalist class. Under capitalism, we must defend freedom of the press even for capitalists -- in order to preserve what there is of it for the labour movement. And under workers power: expropriate the press/media barons! Suppress the counterrevolutionary press! Proportional access to the media for all those currents who accept the workers government!

Strike for the right of reply!

But the capitalist media's bias can still be fought now! Murdoch's lies must not go unanswered. *Strike for the right of workers to answer anti-labour propaganda! Free newspaper space must be provided in the daily papers for working-class views.* News Limited workers must be given prominent newspaper space to respond in the pages of the Murdoch press to any instances of anti-Labor, anti-union bias. *Strike against censorship by the bourgeois press!*

Murdoch and Fairfax have always distorted the news and lied about workers' struggles (and always will). Now they are directing their propaganda at supporting the caretaker government of the union-basher Malcolm Fraser. To keep the government of the Labor Party in; to prevent the crackdown by the state on the unions desired by the ruling class; and to fight against unemployment and the effects of inflation -- both products of the capitalist system -- *the ACTU must call an immediate general strike to dump Fraser.* In a general strike the labour movement would have to organise essential services itself -- including taking over the presses and printing a general-strike newspaper. A general strike to oust Fraser would pose the question of class power, and start to make the need for society to be reorganised by the working class far more immediate.

For an ALP/ACTU government pledged to expropriate the capitalist class!

"But only the blind or feeble-minded could think that as the result of the ban on the reactionary press the workers and peasants can free themselves from the influence of reactionary ideas. In reality, only the greatest freedom of speech, of the press, and of association can create favorable conditions for the advance of the revolutionary movement of the working class." (Leon Trotsky, "Freedom of the Press and the Working Class", 21 August 1938) ■



ASP Photo

At the 15 November anti-Murdoch demonstration outside News Ltd. Spartacist League placards also included the demands "Fight capitalist bias in the media! Strike for workers right of reply!" and "Defend newspaper workers, No layoffs or speed-up".

League, which without participating reported the first demonstration uncritically (Workers News, 17 November 1975), objectively gave support to a current which permeated the demonstrations implicitly pushing for systematic pro-ALP censorship. At the other extreme the Socialist Workers League snivels against "any actions aimed at physically shutting down the yellow press" for fear that the labour movement might appear undemocratic (Direct Action, 20 November 1975). The Spartacist League recognises that workers in the bourgeois newspapers are totally justified in shutting down the press to prevent the publication of the most blatant lies or suppression of information (censorship by the bourgeois media) and to ensure the publication of specific statements from the workers movement (right of reply). But to demand that a bourgeois newspaper change its whole editorial line is dangerous, utopian at best.

The 15 November follow-up demonstration, at which the SL leaflet below was distributed, was under the leadership of the illegitimately deposed former NSW-Builders' Labourers' Federation leadership Joe Owens and Bob Pringle, and under the ideological umbrella of "workers' control". Revolutionaries must agitate in bourgeois newspapers and elsewhere for workers' control, but by this they mean something less than workers' management. If it is to be maintained workers' control must lead in the direction of expropriating the bosses, but cannot go so far as to completely determine editorial policy until it is prepared for armed confrontation with that ultimate protector of the bourgeoisie, its state. For this the class must be united in organs capable of acting as a workers state.

Those who pretend that workers' control can transcend the level of a check on the bosses are at bottom reformists who would blind the class to the power of the state -- preparing the class for slaughter at the hands of its police and army. It is thus no coincidence that Peter Covercroft of the CPA, who was the most articulate spokesman for the utopia of workers' management under the bourgeois state (disguised by the term "workers' control"), was also the most articulate of many who appealed to the 60 or so police who provocatively ringed the 200 demonstrators ("I appeal to rank-and-file coppers ..."). As the first line of armed defence of bourgeois property rights, the police, unlike the rank and file in the second line of defence (the army) are highly conscious of their role as strike-breakers in uniform.

While it is unclear what action, if any, they are now prepared to take most sections of workers

Fight capitalist media bias!

The struggle at News Limited, the newspaper company of press baron Rupert Murdoch, requires a clear perspective if gains are to be made by the working class. News Limited workers, both printers and journo, object to the vicious anti-Labor bias of Murdoch's slanted, anti-working-class "news" reporting and editorials. This bias stems from the nature of the daily press, owned and run by the bosses in the interests of the bosses. We stand in solidarity with protests and demonstrations against their lies and distortions. But some courses of action being urged to fight this bias -- and attempted at the Thursday, 13 November demonstration -- thrusts the struggle in a dangerous direction and can harm the working class.

This has got nothing to do with the reformists' horror at "costing Labor votes" -- when workers' interests are at stake, they must be fought for through the effective methods of class struggle rather than through the ballot box of the bosses' Parliament. But Thursday's attempt by demonstrators to physically block the Daily Mirror delivery trucks, including the symbolic burning of a few bundles, not only was adventurist -- substituting a small number of mainly student demonstrators for mass workers' action -- but was an attempt at political censorship which can only boomerang on the labour movement by inviting restrictions on the limited "freedom of the press" existing under bourgeois democracy. It is a logical development from these tactics to demand that the bourgeois state under a Labor Government should censor the press.

The demand being made on Murdoch to reverse his anti-Labor editorial policy is simply a call for censorship. The inherent bias of the press cannot be eliminated as long as it remains a capitalist press. Calling on the bourgeois state to nationalise the media, even under workers' control (the slogan raised by the Communist League on Thursday), is an invitation to the bourgeois state to impose press censorship. To serve workers' needs, the media must be taken out of the hands of the capitalists by a workers government. *Not nationalisation or censorship by the bourgeois state, but expropriation of the media barons by a workers government!*

For the unions to shut down Murdoch, will neither stop anti-working-class propaganda nor advance working-class views. The media as a whole would remain in the bosses' hands. Even shutting down the entire capitalist press will not be able to stop capitalist propaganda. And at bottom this is because it is a side point: it is not the main struggle. As long as they have

FORUM

The political crisis
and the elections —
the revolutionary perspective

SPEAKER: Bill Logan
(Spartacist League Central Committee)

7.30 pm
Tuesday
2 December

Room 1K
Trades Hall
Sydney