

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas - we must therefore change the ruling class



THE PRAXIS NETWORK



Surplus Value

A JOURNAL OF INDEPENDENT

When do we abolish the Wages System?

Issue No. 03 May 2009

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Contact us at:

The Praxis Network
PO Box 2063
Ashgrove West Qld 4060
AUSTRALIA
Email: contact@surplusvalue.org.au
Website: www.surplusvalue.org.au

The Praxis Network and *Surplus Value* are initiatives of some thinkers and activists around Australia who recognise the value and relevance of Marxism as an analytical and organizational tool. Our initial plan is to build a network of groups and individuals to share ideas, educate ourselves, and to encourage and be

For those of us anxious to see the day when the conditions of wage slavery, that lead to the wages system, are abolished, there are at least two practical obstacles in the way.

Firstly our forces are scattered, divided and small in number. There are many small grouplets of communists, trotskysts, anarchists and others. The character of those groups varies between cities and areas of Australia. Yet none has in recent times demonstrated any significant influence amongst the people – whether that be amongst the organised working class, or amongst the many community movements around environment, peace, or justice.

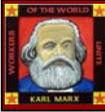
Younger workers many of whom are sympathetic to unions and social movements do not believe that unions offer any significant involvement within these movements. Prior to the federal election the ACTU's Your Rights at Work Campaign began to build on the connections between working

hours, conditions, and pay and the 'health' of their families and communities'. Yet again our unions' participation as an element of a fledgling extra-parliamentary or social movement addressing fundamental inequities has been frittered away since the election of the ALP.

We spend a great deal of our time talking amongst ourselves, but too often not with a view to educating each other, through reciprocal dialogue, but to push preconceived positions and assumptions. Too often this amounts to a predilection for building 'their' organisation at the expense of working toward solutions for the class as a whole.

Second there is widespread acceptance that "there is no alternative to capitalism" The continuing and deepening crisis of capital has led many to question what is happening. Many are asking why they should be asked to pay for a crisis not of their making. Yet those who raise their voices are not questioning the fundamentals of a system which has led to increasing redundancies, increasing layoffs, increasing public support for the owners of the big banks and finance companies, increasing public support for boosts to business.

(cont overleaf)



WHEN DO WE ABOLISH THE WAGES SYSTEM

(continued from front page)

A “left critique” is absent from this growing public discussion. While none of us have ‘the’ answers fundamental knowledge that explains the political and economic nature of exploitation is no longer common knowledge amongst the organised left. Generally speaking the organised political and industrial left apparently do not have the means to explain this critical knowledge to new generations.

In this situation, what are we to do? At a general level we could do no better than take to heart the words of Joe Hill – “*don’t mourn – organise*”.

Yet wherever there is oppression there will be resistance. There are already far more than one hundred flowers of organised resistance already across Australian society. Increasingly bitter trade union struggles – such as that opposing the Australian Building and Construction commission. Increasingly widespread environmental struggles – for example organised community groups aimed at environmental sustainability spring up in every corner of Australia. In Adelaide there are exciting signs of real dialogue and action amongst the environment movement and the traditional left – with the formation of a climate action group that as emerged out of an eco-socialist discussion group. The Victorian branch of the AEU after a vigorous campaign around its new agreement has now hit the 40,000 figure making it one of the biggest unions in the country.

What is common to most of these struggles is not a lack of organisation. Rather it is mostly a lack of a theory which informs and

develops each struggle, and is integrated into that struggle – a theory that looks closely at the role of the state, the real makeup of classes in Australia, and the political economy of Australian society. There could be no better time than the present for a Marxian contribution to the development of such a theory -

FROM THE EDITORS

This is the third of our journals, with the first two produced for May Day in 2007 and 2008. Time has crept up too quickly this year, and we have not had time to gather a wide range of materials for a 2009 journal. However there have been quite a few original contributions to our website

www.surplusvalue.org.au during 2008-09. We have included some of these in this edition of the journal, and trust that a printed record of these articles will be a useful contribution to the ongoing struggle for socialism.

What we lack in numbers we hope is made up for in quality.

Please feel free to contact us via the web site or our email address. Also, please feel free to contribute articles or opinions or feedback about this journal.

Ross Gwyther & Adrian Pollock,

1 May 2009

Socialists and the economy

Peter Curtis

The following is Peter Curtis’s response to observations and questions arising from the economic crisis.

As a socialist and trade union activist, I am raising these critical points among socialist and labour union activists with the hope of

stimulating a dialogue. From there, we can work together to develop a program to carry out our primary task of defending the interests of the Australian working class.

The global economic collapse has already marked this as a period of political transformation. None of the ruling classes’ attempts to solve the crisis will result in greater economic and social equity for the vast majority, the working class.

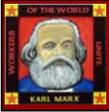
An organised labour voice must be developed if we are to counter the solutions being pushed by the ruling classes to save capitalism at the expense of working people. To win at that defence, we must also offer a vision of how we can transform our lives through socialism.

Labour’s task: Reviving Capitalism or Building Worker’s Solidarity?

Fueling the panic of the ruling classes is the fear that economic disaster will translate into social upheaval. All governments have the powers to disarm industrial and political strikes. The Federal ALP government is reiterating this fact by overtly denying us our critical means of defense, the right to strike, and above all, the political strike.

The armed forces have been gearing up ready to administer the rough justice of the bourgeoisie. The twenty billion dollars spent on the global War on Terror by the Australian nation-market-state is to prepare the armed forces to exercise the mis-named ‘civil power’. Armed force and the legal machinery of the state are being used against organised labour now, and that repression will be stepped up, as in our past.

Organising local industrial and political actions against the inevitable cuts to our tax-funded services and living standards will condition activists for the confrontations between the needs of



our class and the compulsions of capital. Strategically and tactically, workers and our organisations will have to face up to the ways that the state will respond to opposition from the working class. Of course, politically isolated movements, often reactionary formations and particularly the thoughtless violence of disparate gangs and individuals, will be dealt blows relatively easily by the state's enforcers. Such outbreaks are signs of hopelessness and mitigate against class solidarity.

Class solidarity is built in action which is possible only if we are able to develop and provide clear arguments and analyses of the crisis and its effects on the majority, the working class. Hopelessness is born from a sense of powerlessness, that is, the inability to do anything about our predicament. The absence of analysis will continue to be an obstacle to developing a purposeful working-class program and response. Currently, the labour movement is faced with a situation where it has no political leadership to speak of, least of all from the ALP, and, more critically, from the ACTU.

Too many labour leaders are abstaining while countless workers and unionists resist the ceaseless indignities of the conditions driving bosses to turn a profit. Where there is oppression, workers will resist and organise. Some instances are the MUA nationally, and the exemplar of its regenerated WA Branch. Similarly, the postal workers in Victoria persist in their defence of permanent jobs and sustaining postal services despite Federal union obstruction in alliance with brutish Australia Post managers. The building trades and sections of manufacturing maintain their campaign opposing Gillard's Construction Stasi, the ABCC. Through fifteen years of resolute campaigning in the City of Yarra, Socialist Party councilor Steve Jolly

trebled his vote to top the poll last November.

The formation of *Union Solidarity* is another success for working - class organisation. Punching well beyond its weight, *Union Solidarity* reminds the bourgeoisie and their agents that it will be an arduous and ongoing struggle to tame generations of steeled activists. These living, breathing, examples of the working class traditions of the labour movement are, if nothing else, a reminder to our "representatives" within the labour movement of what they once knew, or must relearn. Too many of those who claim to represent us within the ACTU, its affiliates, and their parliamentary leaderships, have become functionaries of the capitalist state.

Neo-liberalism: Disarming the Labour Movement.

Three decades of the neo-liberalism carried out by successive governments of the two key parliamentary parties have left capitalist political economy ideologically dominant. This hegemony is disarming the labour movement's practical struggles for participatory and economic democracy. Despite this continued assault by the corporations and the parliaments, workers have been resisting all the while, with and without their union leaderships.

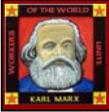
The class struggle is fought out every minute of everyday in everything that we do. No amount of ideological bias or propaganda can eliminate exploitation and the inequality that capitalist political economy builds on. However, no matter the circumstances, it is always difficult to wage a struggle and win ideological clarity. Equally difficult is maintaining those practical and conceptual gains. The ruling classes know it. They have at their disposal not only the political dominance that their boardrooms

carry but equally the collaboration of their fellows in the corporations that organise the mass-media which lives off mass-consumer-culture by driving it forward. Therefore, to revive working class organisation means that we must find our own ways to communicate for our ideological struggle against the rule of capital.

Currently, the ruling classes are getting away with providing the script through their mass-media outlets. Their task is to misinform us about the forces driving this economic turbulence. They are also doing all they can do to placate scared small-business people, lest they lose faith in "individual enterprise". In addition, they work on their in-house concern of whipping their own global corporates into line.

The assumption is that it is capitalists who create wealth, the same class that created the economic and political mess. Who is responsible, and why is there the daily destruction of the means of producing wealth? Who is throwing hundreds of thousands of workers out onto the grass, to shut down more of the machinery in the factories and businesses that they operated? These themes provide questions that are ignored by the corporate-mass-media. True to their class interests they are most concerned to assist in unifying the business, political and union leaderships to resuscitate the capitalist economy at the expense of the majority.

For what reason is the corporate mass-media reiterating that the "increasingly irrelevant trade unions" must assist the bosses in managing the recovery of profit rates? If unions are irrelevant why are litres of ink and volumes of breath being expended by bosses to ensure that *Workchoices Lite*, otherwise known as *FairWork*



Australia, does not see the light of day? While governments may change the demands of the corporate boardrooms do not. So far, the bosses still have little reason to fear anything put by the leadership of the ACTU, who are encouraging the delusion that the *Fair Work Bill* will reinstate or protect their union rights. This legislation, combined with job losses, will make many more of us scabble a living. What becomes of our rights at work then? The ACTU is at a loss to explain anything, offer any counterarguments, least of all, an economic alternative to those offered by corporate leaders. To do otherwise means betraying their allies within the ALP. It is not unions and the organising of workers that is irrelevant. Rather those who stand in the way of a radical class response will make themselves moribund.

Preparing workers for leadership: A collective responsibility?

To provide the leadership necessary to prepare workers and families, and the generations of younger workers, we need to understand why the capitalist's system has succumbed to its internal contradictions. The corporate masters are justified in their concerns about rebellions within the ranks of our unions as more of us understand why labour needs to regroup.

Ruling-class descriptions and analyses variously describe our unfolding predicament as anywhere between a loss of confidence, deregulation and extreme greed by a few investors and bank managers. The spin of a few CEO's reducing their salary to one dollar a year is example enough of this gambit. What the ruling classes can not expose is that the looming catastrophe erupted through the financial sector, but is now manifest where it had its origins, namely, in

the production of goods and services. We face a crisis of capital accumulation.

The point that needs to be emphasised over and over again, and then some more, is that the cause is the failure of capitalist accumulation, over-production, and the consequent expansion of credit. To describe the meltdown as a "financial crisis" is to miss the crux. That description reinforces the misconceptions fostered by the mass-media, including Radio National, twenty-four-seven. They dare not probe into production for fear of uncovering exploitation.

How will the educators be educated?

Workers are already expected to make all the sacrifices for the "common good" and to foot any of the bills run up by our rulers. The immediate destination for workers and many school leavers will be the dole queue, missing out on the experiences of older workers and the social organisation that workplace activism instills. Understanding that there is an economic crisis is hard enough. But in the absence of any radical alternatives, we are abandoned to the prejudices and the self-deceiving explanations of the ruling class's think tanks, CEOs and politicians.

We are facing a systemic meltdown of the global economy, which while complex to comprehend, needs to be understood and explained if we are to organise responses which we can achieve. Reaching knowledge is never an easy task and does require thinking through our fears, and moving beyond trembling, so that we can consider, collectively, the myriad implications, both positive and negative, for our proximate futures.

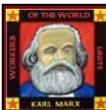
The devastation blasting through the corporate sector should alert those of us in government service about what is to come. The state is

spending billions to refinance capital and stimulate liquidity through the system. Who will fund the state's debts? Who will pay the costs? What will the implications be for recurrent funding levels of health and hospitals, public education, transport and the multitude of other services that we appreciate fully only after they are gone?

The bastardry of Australia Post management toward their workers over the past decade is but one toxic example of a continuing and unfolding story of reducing a permanent public service workforce to on-call casuals. The corporatising thrust is always to pay workers only for the times when they are adding value by producing goods and services. That regime is being imposed on all tax-funded activities. A reliable government postal service, or any tax-funded service, is not essential to the corporate pursuit of profits. Many corporations have other corporate systems. What will working citizens do?

Socialist sections of the labour movement failed to fix on these concerns. The current political and economic conditions, and their histories, need to be investigated. The impact is being felt in Australia - here - in our workplaces, homes and suburbs. They are the sites where we should be active, with all our energy, because it is there that we can do the maximum damage to global capital.

Echoing the misleading description of the "financial crisis", the left's message generally fails to emphasise the significance of the current global economic catastrophe for the Australian working class. Almost every socialist grouplet website, by way of current example, is emphasising events in the Middle East. Horrific as that barbarism is, there is little we can do about it other than maintain



focus on our common enemy here in this country.

Socialist currents within the labour movement cannot afford to have our agendas set for us by the global highlights of the mass media, nor by the moralising of petty-bourgeois liberals and their hopes for justice in the abstract. As activists within the labour movement, we must pursue radical explanations – getting to the root – listen to the concerns of others, and ask ourselves questions. To do this requires giving the same attention as the ruling classes are to the demands of thinking in terms of political-economy.

Unemployment is the concern of us all. Already workers are being thrown out of their jobs, regardless of their income and status. Labour organisations need to be prepared to set agendas rather than merely react. Unions have adopted and carried out policies that acquiesce in, rather than challenge the rule of capital. In practice, too many unions are assistants to management. Often, they educate young workers to be anti-union. Class compromise of this kind provides ever more opportunities for the capitalists to disorganise workers and thereby increase exploitation, making militants ‘redundant’. Sell-outs must be met with hostility from our rank and file as shown by the victories of the Victorian posties.

The Socialist Project, here, now, in Australia

Economic and political mayhem is now beginning to blow through our communities. As workers and political activists, we can only demonstrate our commitment to the defense of the common good by advancing the theoretical and practical steps to do what ever is necessary for our class to voice its needs. From there, the movement will be able to expand to engage all

who recognise the need for a socialist project in their backyards.

A socialist and Marxist orientation to political organisation means to educate, and most critically, be educated by our class. Collective enlightenment requires tolerance and patience with each other as we seek clarity on the conceptual questions of political economy and of philosophical and scientific Materialism. Those of us who are committed to a Socialist Republic of Australia must develop the means for popularising this idea among our class. Our collective belief should surely be that such a national objective still provides the minimum inspiration to defend our labour movement. In the process, we will develop the means to transform our class internationally.

Marx and Engels still and will endlessly challenge us to find the keenest methods for explicating the forms of tyranny arising from the political-economy of the capitalist class. We must strive to absorb the intelligence and methods of the founders of Marxism into a practical thoughtfulness. As activists, we require the means to achieve clarity around how best to provide the means most necessary to develop organisationally and theoretically a broad socialist current within the labour movement. This practical activity can provide the political leavening within our class.

Monopoly capitalism uses the state’s machinery for disorganising the labour movement. These methods and results can only ever be draconian impositions on the majority of wage slaves. The ruling classes have demonstrated disregard for any of our commonly recognised human rights, so much so, that it is no longer possible for social democrats to put any sort of democratic gloss over a sell out. We can see the obvious political and

economic class bind that the Federal ALP Government is in regarding the *FairWork Australia* bill and their refusal to abolish the ABCC.

The loss of livelihoods and freedoms of expression are not coincidental and will provide the grist for processes that will drive a multiplicity of workers to rise and meet the demands necessary for defending our class interests. The meeting of these commonly held needs and interests provide the possibility of a transformation that can carry forward the well-being of our species and of our planet.

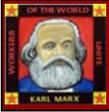
We build barricades to spot who is lurking on the other side of the class divide. Our choices then become sharper. We work, live and love in this country, and we must work out for ourselves the terms that make struggles meaningful for working people, here and now. To say otherwise suggests we are not deserving of their interest. We have everything to lose, our self-preservation as a class, and with it, any chance of transforming the social order so that a more truly human history can begin.

US Thinks to Itself: What a Beautiful Recession!

Don Wilson

The current world wide depression is a tragedy to the working people everywhere – especially in the third world. The robber barons of US Imperialism, however, are endeavouring to use this ‘crisis’ to increase their hegemony of the world’s strategic resources. The dominance of finance capital over industrial capital pointed out by Lenin is now obvious. Industry’s depression is now finance capital’s boom and the robber barons are on a shopping spree.

The so called ‘bailout’ is exactly that: Bailing public money into the



coffers of the financial robber barons responsible for this crisis. Far from improving the situation this massive transfer of wealth to the financial giants is the cause of further financial collapse. The real and possibly intended consequence of the 'bailout' is the unprecedented concentration of banking power and wealth into the hands of the financial robber barons. The bailout money is reinvested in the acquisition of real assets. The financial imperialists, through their overriding control over credit, are in the process of transforming paper wealth into the ownership and control of real productive assets around the world, including industry, services, natural resources and infrastructure.

This unprecedented concentration of financial power spearheads entire sectors of industry into bankruptcy, leading to the layoff of tens of thousands of workers. In the US the old giant companies with huge pension fund debts to its workers are being liquidated. This is paving the way for a neo-liberal manufacturing process, free of all the gains won by workers over the past 100 years. The ensuing mass poverty and world wide decline in living standards is the outcome of the preexisting policies of so called economic rationalism that saw whole industries shifted to low wage countries. The current crisis extends the dominance of the cheap labor economy, and subsequent concentrations of working poor to include even the middle class, in the so-called developed countries Michael Chossudovsky sums it up perfectly.

"The financial crisis is being used by Wall Street big-wigs to restructure the economy and create a permanent class of working poor". [Michel Chossudovsky: The Great Depression of the 21st Century: Collapse of the Real Economy.]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10977>

In his article The G-20 Washout, Mike Whitney (November 17, 2008) pointed out that the recent G 20 conference was "a blueprint for maintaining dollar hegemony and Wall Street's continued dominance over global finance."

"Despite the outcry for meaningful reform, the summit only reinforces the status quo; the same old American-led financial system. In fact, there appears to be growing consensus that the IMF should spearhead the programs that provide liquidity to the developing countries that are getting pounded by the downturn. This is a major setback. It restores the IMF--which is the "iron fist" of the US Treasury-- to its former glory so it can once again use its extortionist loans to thrust faltering nations into structural adjustment, privatization and slave wages. The meetings are breathing new life into the failed neo-liberal policies...."

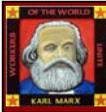
The US dollar is the world's reserve currency. All OPEC oil and most of the world's commodity trade is conducted in US dollars. This means all countries trading commodities must retain large reserves of US dollars. The process of trading commodities-hiring ships and more importantly financing and insuring cargoes, is done by the 400 year system of Letters of Credit and this is largely conducted in US dollars. This has been seen as a low risk financial transaction because the loan was guaranteed by the value of the cargo itself. But today the violent fluctuation in the value of commodities has resulted in the collapse of the system which is known as the Baltic Dry Index. [The London Banker and RGE Monitor. Letters of Credit and The Disruption of International Trade: Systemic Risk, Contagion and Trade Finance'

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article21231.htm>'].]

The result is that those with goods to export and those with goods to import, no matter how worthy and well capitalised, are left standing quayside if they lack the bank finance for trade. Non-US banks have been progressively starved of dollar credit. Recent currency swaps between central banks and the allocation of Federal Reserve dollar liquidity has been restricted pro US countries. The US is in the position to constrain or extend trade finance liquidity at its discretion, prejudicing the economic prospects of a large part of the world that is either indifferent or hostile to the continuation of American dollar hegemony.

"If cargo trade stops, a whole lot of supply chain disruption starts. Controlling access to trade finance determines who loses their jobs, whose children go hungry, who riots, which governments fall." Countries in Latin America such as Venezuela can be brought to their knees, and the IMF (US Treasury) will once again entangle them in their web of debt. November 15, 2008 -- "Global Research"

The US is peddling the idea of a new Breton Woods to restore their world order and dollar tyranny. The people need a system that strengthens national sovereignty, cooperation, and international law and embodies protection for strategic national resources and industries. This is in the interests of working people in Australia. The conspiracies of the Empire directly confront the working people. The Imperialists base their confidence in success on their forces of police, courts and military. That underestimates the strength of a united working class.



An Example of Action on Climate Change

Stephen Darley

A key demand of the Australian people is for environmental issues to be given full attention rather than tokenism under the influence of big business interests. One response was organising a CAG (grass-roots-level Climate Action Group) in Adelaide. It emerged what's called the Ecosocialist Discussion group, which is made up of leftists from a range of parties and independents. After a few months of discussing the cross-over between the two major contradictions of capitalism (climate change - sustainability and economic crisis), some people wanted to organise not just discuss.

So we set up CLEAN (SA) (the Climate Action Emergency Network), and things moved very quickly from there. There was a clear gap, as the old peak-body groups (The ACF, the Con. Council, the Wilderness Society, etc.) had and have very little idea how to organise amongst the people, having been wedded for many years to lobbying and fund-raising and deep compromises with government and business. They didn't realise that consciousness on the climate change issue amongst the public had leapt ahead of them in many ways.

So we organised an activist and educational conference in alliance with the Australian Education Union, and had over two hundred participants in the public meeting and 150 in the conference. Since then we've organised all the significant actions on climate change in Adelaide, started to set up a network of local groups, and participated in a National Summit in Canberra with 140 other groups (predominantly grass-roots and of recent vintage, but with a couple of the more active older groups like FOE and Greenpeace), and 550 people participating. This set 4 national joint actions for the year, created email networks on key sub-issues (such as just transition (working with unions and workers to move from a fossil fuel economy to a renewable one in a just way) and climate justice (global issues of social justice)).

So we responded to a clear demand by the Australian people to address a major issue which the previous government was ignoring and the present one is slighting under the influence of major business lobbies. We organised a cross-party and cross-ideology group, but still constantly are coming across and confronting the contradiction between what we are trying to achieve under the advice of science and the limitations of capitalism and the capitalist state (the current dud emissions trading scheme (the CPRS) is an excellent example), so inevitably raising Marxist analysis and strategies. It's early days yet, but the relative speed of advance (compared for example to the near-stagnation in anti-war work after the first couple of years) is a sign of the demand from the people for action.

Going to extremes

Humphrey McQueen

Written for and delivered at the Spirit of Eureka conference in Melbourne on 28 november 2008.

With politicians bleating against "extreme" capitalism, activists need to be clear about our own extremism. Taking a leaf from *Equality* by the English Christian socialist, R. H. Tawney (1880-1962), here are three ways to be extreme.

First, we need to be extreme in our efforts to understand the dynamics causing the crisis in the accumulation of capital. In particular, we need to get beyond the media pap about a "financial" crisis. We have to recognise that the banking and stock-market upheavals are expressing the il-logic of over-production. The crisis began in the physical economy and is now looping back to intensify those disruptions.

Armed with that understanding, we can become extreme in working out policies to resist any shifting of the costs of the looming catastrophe onto working people. For instance, we need to learn how to tie our understanding of housing finance to tactics for preventing evictions within a strategy to protect the environment.

We can interpret the world only by changing it, and change it effectively only by interpreting it profoundly.

Secondly, we need to be extreme in our preparedness to keep quiet until we have made progress on each element in the previous extreme. Let's leave it to the politicians to behave like kitchen tidies, their mouths flying open to reveal garbage whenever a journalist steps on their pedals.

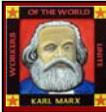
No one can know exactly what is happening with the world economy. Still less can we predict where the next eruption will be. No one knows in detail how best to respond to promote the needs of working people. Within the laws of capital accumulation, new things continue to happen. We have to be extreme in keeping up with those developments.

As always, we have to listen and learn. Organising is education for the activist as much as for the masses. The educator must be re-educated.

Thirdly, we must become extreme in our determination to apply the lessons learned from the two other "extremes". We have to be rigorous in our analysis, ready to jettison early approximations whenever evidence and concepts sharpen our understanding.

In terms of fighting back, the implosion of global capital is no time for rhetorical bluster, of sounding more "left" than everybody else. A huge amount of rebuilding has to be done, organisationally in workplaces and in communities. Many of the insights into exploitation that were taken for granted twenty years ago have to be re-established as common sense.

For each extreme, we could well revive the pledge at Eureka: "We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties." In the short term, we need to be extreme in our understanding and application of "truly".



Discussion on Fire:

The following is an email discussion between Peter Curtis and Steve Darley which was conducted on the Surplus Value email group in March 2009. The discussion ensued following the Victorian bushfires.

Peter Curtis:

Society's Natural Disasters.

The coincidence of the global economic meltdown and natural disasters and the affects on our domestic economy, and then to witness the range of responses to the personal tragedies of the bushfires in Victoria and the prolonged floods in the North of the country provoke a number of questions. Natural disasters like the bushfires and floods generally produce responses that encourage a sense of unity through a common sense of grief and dispossession that requires a generalised government and community response if the worst of their initial effects are to be overcome.

Governmental and community responses to natural disasters stand to contrast the responses to the economic crisis which is the product of solely human causes. Without detracting at all from the genuine loss and hardship caused by the bushfires, one should be permitted to ask the question, why not similar support for those that are losing their livelihoods as a consequence of a crisis of capitalism? The devastating loss of loved ones and homes in fire or flood is partly so profound because of its relative immediacy and speed – here one minute and gone the next!

However the slow burn of socially and economically determined devastation to families and lives does not appear to attract the same level of concern necessary for a unified community and government response. Natural disasters initially disguise the class concerns that are always present and that is good for all politicians keen on building kudos and overcoming bad publicity. How politicians and governments respond to people's dilemmas arising from natural disasters can make and break their electoral prospects. Will it be the same when it comes to their management of the global and domestic economic crisis?

With little exception the answer appears to be demonstrably no. Will governments do "what ever it takes" to ensure that no worker that loses their job will lose their home too? Will governments ensure that the police will be used to prevent the bank's bailiffs from gaining entry to loot? Will the community do all it can to ensure that the welfare and homes of those who lose their jobs will be looked after?

An important distinction between natural causes of disaster and a socially produced economic one is that the former has no other cause than nature itself – there is nothing to blame other than nature itself. To be deprived of shelter and livelihoods as a consequence of nature's fury is one thing, but to aim our fury at a ruling class with scant regard for the collective economic wellbeing of our families and communities is quite another.

Steve Darley

Sorry, but this is NOT simply a natural disaster, and few natural disasters are simply that. They all have underlying factors either of indirect causation (such as climate change and the bushfires) or in how they are dealt with (e.g. Hurricane Katrina and the differential response/discrimination on class and racial lines), and often both. Even the most 'natural' of natural disasters (such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions) lead to a socialisation of human and monetary costs and a privatisation of benefits (e.g. theft/diversion of aid). So how natural are they? I think the distinction you are making is too absolute.

Peter Curtis

Hi Stephen and others,

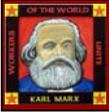
You are right. Natural disasters are more often than not social in their making, or rather the social conditions exacerbate the affects and responses to a natural occurrence - hence it becomes a disaster. The poor live in slums built on unstable mountain sides, many people living in Kinglake did so because land was cheap 20 to 30 years ago in the un-serviced bush and so on. I will reserve judgment on the climate change as a causal factor because the term has come to mean, 'do nothing it's climate change'. It is a very convenient

escape clause for political and business leaders as effectively they can argue that climate change is 'nature' rather than address social inequity. As to how we quantify human contributions to human enhanced greenhouse effect I am not sure. The ubiquitous use of the term also means there has been a lose of accuracy and meaning, that the term is stating the obvious, that the climate has always changed, as does everything. So climate change as a term does not help to explain anything.

While a cause of the a fire may not be caused by a natural occurrence - e.g. bushfire and lightening strike - but by an arsonist or broken power line does not alter the fact that the conditions within the natural environment mean that it is ripe for a fire. How we take into account our place within such an environment is critically important. Land use and housing are two examples of the irrationality of the political economy of capitalism. A visit to the new dormitory suburbs on the outer limits of metro Melbourne, in the bush, will confirm that point. Generally there has been no serious attempt to alter our settler/colonial mind-set, to think beyond the limits of capitalism, so that we can raise concerns and address the questions we have to face if we are to effectively adapt to the demands of the Australian climate.

The point I was trying to make in the brief article was that there does appear to be a distinction that most people make between a natural and social disaster, not withstanding the social aspects. The general feeling here in Victoria is that, 'we are one, we are all in this together regardless of social class. Politically the response is to disregard the social inequities, not to raise these issues as it disrespectful to the suffering and to the efforts of rebuilding. So why does this 'feeling' have such currency? I suggest that we all feel vulnerable because nature, in this case wild fire does not make social distinctions.

Some responses by socialists in an attempt to draw out the distinctions between nature and society have suggested that 'capitalism causes bushfires'. This has baffled people because the connection is difficult without understanding what is meant by



the term capitalism. The statement also suggests that 'under socialism' there would not be any bushfires. To put the issue so crudely is thoughtless and lazy, and displays a fundamental disconnect with our political constituency. Another suggestion has been that the activities of 'everyman' demonstrates that the working class could run society and the emergency response is a practical demonstration of workers control.

A discussion around these issues could well be fruitful, even if the connection between the emergency response and political and economic causes and workers control is a stretch. Disaster responses highlight the possibilities that our communities and governments have to address the social inequality that surrounds us. To draw to a close - why do natural disasters disguise class and social issues of inequity and why is the response to the economic crisis not attracting the same level of generalised concern? In both cases families lose houses, and lives.

Steve Darley

I agree with most of what you said, Peter, though not on climate change. But more on that shortly. On the bushfires, one useful contribution I read (in Crikey) made the point that the 'go early or stay' policy was based on an individualist ethic focused on property, which was a change in the character of responses in the region, and probably in Australia as a whole. They made the point that towns such as those devastated often used to have communal (council) shelters, which have been neglected in recent years, and in fact closed down by state government lack of funding. Now, I've heard two opinions on shelters, from people who seemed to have extensive knowledge: one, that the commonly short passage of intense fire-fronts (say 15 minutes) meant that a certain number of people can survive long enough, with enough air, to be safe in mud brick, concrete or preferably below-ground earth shelters/bunkers. Two, that this is wrong, that these fires often last much longer, and thus air will run out in the shelters. Regardless, it is an issue worth investigation: and the individualist ethic of fighting a fire for your property seems certainly to contradict the more collective ethos of the CFS. The

question being, has the ideology of property-owning capitalism indeed made things worse in this respect?

On climate change, I understand the phenomenon you are describing, but I think it's secondary to the effort to obscure the role of CC in the bushfires, now and in the future. The Amanda Divine and Murdoch press in general stuff about blaming Greenies for lack of fuel reduction policies seemed to me to be a classic diversionary tactic. Not that I can't be critical of especially wilderness-oriented greenies in this respect, but it's a major exaggeration. The fact is plenty of scientists have been warning for several years now that the combination of CC and drought, itself partly driven or intensified by CC, will inevitably lead both to more and to more intense bushfires. And that's what we got, are still getting and will get more of. I am involved in a CC activist group, and the answer to 'climate change as inevitable and as nature at work' arguments is more effective political propaganda work, not giving up the fight. For instance, the CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) is a rotten-ripe object lesson in how corporate priorities override the interests of the people of Australia: individual efforts towards renewables for instance, only serve to make polluting cheaper for the fossil fuel and high-energy intensive industries; and they get massive 'compensation' (\$3.9 billion to the fossil fuel industry alone) for NOT being exempt from a measly 5% target. A national coalition of grass-roots CC activist groups are spreading that message right now, and surely it fits in very well with your argument about the social/class context of 'natural' crises/disasters?

Peter Curtis

An important distinction that I am trying to make is not on climate change but on the responses of the community and government to what are generally called 'natural disasters' and that which is thoroughly, from the root, a social product of our political-economic relationships.

Have and will governments rebuild communities that are, and will suffer, as consequence of capitalist economic crisis or not; will they send in the forces

of state power to ensure homes are not reposed and so on. This is the strong point I am trying to make because it is being ignored by those who should be most engaged with these questions, the labour movement.

Robert Tressell and the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1906)

Jim Sharp.

g'day comrades

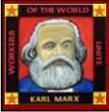
a friend sent me this today & i thought i'd share it with youse, coz it's still as relevant for workers today as in his day. When i was a young fella a few of my muckers were painters & decorators & the ragged trousered philanthropist was the "P's & D's Tradesman's Bible!" as well as being widely read by all workers. tressell was a truly working class scholar & seer, who i feel wud see thru today's SUPERINTENDENT reforms in our ranks, who prescribe "unrooting black wage slaves to the picking fields, where banks & cockies will reap off their surplus value at super exploitation rates.

Robert Tressell (born Robert Noonan) was, in real life, one of the workmen that he describes in his Novel The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist. His work was one of, if not the first, working class novel ever written. The novel was written in the years 1906-08. He died of tuberculosis in 1911.

I love the clear and simple way he describes the absurdity of the Capitalist system and the degree to which we assimilate and accept the ideology of private monopoly ownership of the world's resources.

An extract:

Landlordism is one of the causes of poverty,' Owen repeated. 'Poverty is not caused by men and women getting married; it's not caused by machinery;



it's not caused by "over-production"; it's not caused by drink or laziness; and it's not caused by "over-population". It's caused by Private Monopoly. That is the present system. They have monopolized everything that it is possible to monopolize; they have got the whole earth, the minerals in the earth and the streams that water the earth.

The only reason they have not monopolized the daylight and the air is that it is not possible to do it. If it were possible to construct huge gasometers and to draw together and compress within them the whole of the atmosphere, it would have been done long ago, and we should have been compelled to work for them in order to get money to buy air to breathe. And if that seemingly impossible thing were accomplished tomorrow, you would see thousands of people dying for want of air - or of the money to buy it - even as now thousands are dying for want of the other necessities of life. You would see people going about gasping for breath, and telling each other that the likes of them could not expect to have air to breathe unless they had the money to pay for it. Most of you here, for instance, would think so and say so. Even as you think at present that it's right for a few people to own the Earth, the Minerals and the Water, which are all just as necessary as is the air.

In exactly the same spirit as you now say: "It's Their Land," "It's Their Water," "It's Their Coal," "It's Their Iron," so you would say "It's their Air," "These are Their gasometers, and what right have the likes of us to expect them to allow us to breath-- for nothing~" [And even while he is doing this the air monopolist will be preaching sermons on the Brotherhood of Man; he will be dispersing advice on "Christian Duty" in the Sunday magazines; he will give utterance to numerous more or less moral maxims for the guidance of the young. And meantime, all around, people will be dying for want of some of the air -that he will have bottled up in his gasometers.

And when you are all dragging out a miserable existence, gasping for breath or dying for want of air, if one of your number suggests smashing a hole

in the side of one of the gasometers, you will all fall upon him in the name of law and order, and after doing your best to tear him limb from limb, you'll drag him, covered with blood, in triumph to the nearest Police Station and deliver him up to "justice" in the hope of being given a few half-pounds of air for your trouble.'

Humphrey McQueen on the current Crisis of Capitalism

Since September 2008, Humphrey McQueen has penned almost 30 short essays on aspects of the current crisis.

These are all published on our website at www.surplusvalue.org.au

Included below are five of these articles

[Exploitation leads to over-consumption](#) (28th September 2008)

Even if \$US700bn cauterises the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market, it will not touch the core of the crisis. The root cause is the exploitation of wage-labour by capital.

That fact played next-to-no part in the opposition to WorkChoices. Even the Left focussed on Howard's personality or his ideology. The ACTU is left with no explanation for Gillard's Fairness as a different way of organising capital and disorganising labour. Worst of all, the Left grouplets missed the chance to revive an understanding of the laws of capital among militants. The present upheaval offers a chance to repair that fault.

Marxist-Leninists do not possess a magic wand for tracking the snakes-and-ladders of the financial chaos of the past fifteen months. Nor do we have a solution up our sleeves. Still less can we predict where the market will be tomorrow, or the system rupture next.

What we do know for sure is why such events are intrinsic to the expansion of capital. The competition among capitals combines with pressure from wage-slaves to drive each corporation to increase output. The resultant increase in commodities must be sold if capitals are to profit from the surplus value

added by the workers. There's the rub. The exploitative nature of the system means that the workers must not get the full value of their labour-time. The result is a gap between production and consumption.

Capitalism has outlasted Marx's expectations by coming up with ways to counter its necessity of its over-productioin - war-making and mass marketing built on consumer credit. In the employment relationship, capital advances wages out of the money-capital it has accumulated from previous exploitation. The sales effort introduced a twist on this process. The worker is advanced money on the labour-time of years ahead, not days or weeks. Wages are paid to let the wage-slaves buy the commodities we need to reproduce our capacities to labour - food, shelter. Loans are made to help those workers buy up the expanded commodities. In the main, that credit is repaid with interest.

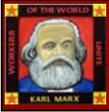
However, 60 years of expanding household debts had reached the limit for those who could afford to repay. As Robert Brenner put it, the affluent were using their houses as ATMs by borrowing against their rising prices. Hence, the financiers pushed beyond the boundaries of prudence towards embracing those who had been denied loans even for household items, let alone houses. But needs must. The risk, of course, was recognised. Slicing and shaving the loans was going to limit the defaults to any one institution. Instead, it spread them globally.

Here is the path between the class struggle and the sub-prime. To absorb excess capacity, capital has added "over-consumption" to its catalogue of solutions that spawns ever more problems.

In the days to come, I shall pen further 500-word comments on the previous points, and plenty more. Tomorrow, I shall return to the bail-out to dispose of the chatter about its being socialist.

Meanwhile, the best short course is to spend three hours, pen in hand, with Marx's *Wage-Labour and Capital*.

How to lose a trillion. (2 October)



When the radio news reported that the New York Stock market had “lost” a trillion dollars, my eyes glazed over.

A trillion is what Douglas Hofstadter calls a Very Big Number, meaning that we have no way of coping with so many zeros after the one (\$1,000,000,000,000). Those Arabic symbols might as well be in Roman numerals for all the use they are. According to Hofstadter, the newsreader might as well have said “zillions”, for all the information that “trillion” conveys.

Those noughts add up to a sense of hopelessness. Therefore, the development of the class struggle, or a retirement plan, requires that we deflate the Very Big Numbers. The way of doing so is to puncture that non-doing word, “lost”.

We understand what it means to lose a wallet or a purse. We also know that those objects almost certainly still exist somewhere. It’s just that we cannot put our hands on them for the moment. One little difference is that the trillion dollars no longer exist because - and this is the key - they never did.

The “value” put on each company’s stock is determined by the latest bid price for one of its shares, multiplied by the number of shares issued. The “value” of the entire stock market, in turn, is calculated by multiplying the prices paid for the fraction of shares traded each day by the total number of shares of all listed firms.

Take a homely contrast. In the first case, you have paid \$300,000 of your earnings into your industry super fund. The market plummets and you have to retire on \$200,000. You have indeed lost at least \$100,000. Now, consider this alternative. While you were buying \$300,000 worth of super, its realisable value went up to \$600,000. Had you cashed it in, you would have made \$300,000. But, alack, the market collapsed before you go grey-nomading so that you have to live off only \$500,000. You feel as if you have lost \$100,000, although that is money you never paid out. (OK, OK, there were also opportunity costs.)

For many traders, the trillion dollar loss was also on paper. Of course, there are some real losers, those who did not find a Greater Fool to buy them out in time.

On Monday, New York went down by a trillion, then, on Tuesday, it went back up by \$600bn. That bounce was not from the influx of \$600bn of capital. After all, the justification for the \$700 billion bailout is that those sums are not available.

All that happened was that enough bargain-hunters bought just enough shares at a marginally greater price than the day’s before so that when those handful of bids were multiplied by all the shares, they added up to \$600bn.

Had everyone offered to sell all of their shares on either day, all the stocks would be worthless. The bailout and nationalisations are to deter investors from fleeing into bonds or gold. Should that happen, the aged pension will be cut by \$30.

Fascism (24th October 2008)

Shouting “Fascist!” at the television whenever Howard appeared was a comfort, but neither effective nor accurate. The threats from WorkChoices and the anti-terror laws are part of the normal functioning of any dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and continue to be so under the ALP.

The legal and cultural restrictions implemented by the Coalition were not fascism, or even a drift in that direction. They were examples of how a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie operates in a liberal democracy. Pointing up the reality of bourgeois democracy is more radical than bleating “fascist” at every right-wing parliamentarian.

Historical materialists attend to the balance of class forces at each phase in the accumulation of capital. We ridicule “universals” such as “power” when investigating social relationships just as we spurn “Ideal Forms” as the criteria for deciding what is or is not fascism. (My talk - “If it’s not fascism,

what is it?” - can be heard via a link on my website.)

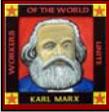
Proceeding from the conjunctural, we recognise that fascisms emerged in the early 1920s to deal with a specific crisis, namely, rolling challenges to the rule of capital from a revolutionary proletariat and peasantry. (It is worth adding that defeat of the Bolsheviks would have paved the way for a Russian variant of fascism.) From the late 1920s, a rupture in capital accumulation compounded that open war between classes. The German bourgeoisie answered the intersection of upsurge and implosion with an overt dictatorship, as distinct from the covert one during the Weimar Republic.

The gulf between those forces and those behind Workchoices are clear. Workchoices was not a response to any challenge from the working class. On the contrary, Workchoices got as far as it has because of the disorganising of the labour movement through the Hawke-Keating-Kelty Accords.

From the early 1980s, monopolising competition intensified the demands on capitals to lower the socially necessary costs of reproducing units of universal labour-time in commodities. This compulsion is the reality of globalisation. Workchoices encouraged bosses to meet that pressure through longer working days and weeks, speed-ups and unpaid overtime. Since 2007, that intensifying of the production of surplus value has been disrupted by blockages in its realisation as profit.

What has changed is not the government but the structured dynamics of the crisis. That development imposes more burdens on workers. Any resistance will generate require novel measures from the agents of capital. If we are closer to an open dictatorship under the ALP than under Howard it is because of a transformation in the crisis confronting capital.

Thus far, the crisis in accumulation has not provoked mass challenges. When it does, the ruling class will not return to inter-war style fascism. Hence, scanning the political landscape for neo-Nazi insignia will blind us to the hard core of the state. Its



elite squads of police and in the armed services will give the agents of capital the time to establish novel forms of overt and covert dictatorship.

Socialists never forget that, although we recognise that bourgeois democracy is a sham, it is the fascist for whom democracy is a bourgeois sham.

Reformism (28 October)

Accusations of “reformism” ricochet around meetings of Left grouplets. If only the proletariat would see through reformists and embrace our revolutionary program ...

As the crisis in the expanded reproduction of capital unfolds, so does the need for strategies and tactics to protect working people. To devise these lines of action revolutionaries need to ponder what these alternatives of revolution and reformism mean in daily life.

An earlier piece discussed why state violence makes revolution a graveyard for socialists more than for capitalism. Does the impossibility of revolution succeeding here for any foreseeable future reduce the Left to reformism?

To answer, we must banish the Philosophically Idealist notion that “reformism” is a mistaken idea. Marx satirised the Young Hegelians for supposing that people drowned because their minds were full of the idea of gravity. If only they could free themselves from that idea, their lungs would not fill with water.

Mao was spot-on for saying that correct ideas do not drop out of the sky and not are innate in our minds. They derive, he went on, from social practice and from it alone. The catch is that so do incorrect ideas. That is why reformism is pervasive. Which social practice gives reformism its staying and pulling powers? Reformism is the hourly practice of the proletariat in our struggle for survival.

Who does more to maintain the rule of capital than wage-slaves selling our labour power. Without that

exchange, no surplus value could be produced and capital could not exist. Telling workers to stop being “reformists” is like telling them to stop eating. By contrast, revolutionary practices form almost no part of the daily doings of any Australian worker.

Reformism also deserves to be distinguished from opportunism and careerism, which can be seen as more or less conscious choices.

Reformism is often associated with “trade union politics”, or what Lenin called “economism”. This limitation is not always consciously anti-revolutionary. One strand in the IWW rejected all forms of politics, not just parliamentary cretinism, in favour of direct action at the point of production. Their critics wanted to know how that focus could vanquish the state.

Two other forms of “economism” have competed for leadership the Australian labour movement. On one hand, a *strategic* economism found expression in the Communist Parties. They accepted that there could be no end to exploitation within capitalism. Their often militant campaigns taught, in word and deed, that there could be no such thing as a fair day’s pay and that the state was the instrument of class rule.

In *tactical* economism, on the other hand, unionists and politicians either ignore or deny those insights; instead, they plead for a fair-go through a state which they picture as a neutral umpire.

In practice, strategic economists are often compelled to do much the same but from a contrary frame of reference. One task for revolutionaries is make that frame more than rhetorical.

No demand is intrinsically reformist. For instance, the right to form a union becomes revolutionary if the bosses refuse and what wage-slaves cannot capitulate.

Reformism appeals because it is grounded in a solution to the here and the now. Hence, militants cannot argue someone out of reformism as they

might change a friend’s mind about a dropped catch by showing the ball from a different camera angle. As with religion, the call to abolish reformism is the call to abolish the conditions that make it necessary.

Turnovers (16 February)

This sequence of responses to the crisis in the accumulation of capital has stressed the need to return to Marx’s critique of political economy.

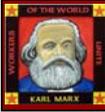
Even people who accept the relevance of *Capital* to the exploitation of labour wonder whether those insights can help us to penetrate a financial crisis. That skepticism is reasonable unless exploitation and high finance can be linked.

The earliest of these items showed how the eruption of the current crisis in the financial sector is the latest instance of the crises that arise through the expropriation of surplus value. (The crisis flows from the inability of aggregate capital to realise a profit because wages are less than the value of the commodities in which surplus value resides. In such circumstances, more sections of capital attempt to make money out of money, that is, by swindling each other. Exploitation is thus pivotal to the financial crisis.)

Asserting that Marx must be the starting point for every analysis of capitalism is vacuous without demonstrating how that truth in detail. As a contribution towards that understanding, this item takes a two-page segment from Chapter 12, ‘The Working Period’, in Volume Two of *Capital*.

Bank rescue packages are promoted to get money-capital flowing for businesses. This item will track the effects from blockages in access to money-capital by pursuing the crux of Marx’s analysis in Chapter 12:

Interruptions and disturbances of the social production



process, as a result of crises, for example, thus have a very different effect on those products of labour that are discrete in nature, and those whose production requires a longer connected period.

Marx illustrates this unevenness by comparing extreme scales of production - a factory producing cotton goods with a workshop making locomotives. In the first case, the working period is one week while in the second example the period runs to three months.

Any return of surplus value as profit is always delayed by a period of circulation. The turnover times in both cases, therefore, will be longer than the working period.

In both cases, money-capital is needed to buy labour power, raw materials, semi-finished goods and ancillaries such as power.

A Chinese sweatshop delivers cartons of socks every day. Suppose also that they are paid for them on delivery. That small business might scrape by without borrowing at all. Its owner will use the receipts from Friday to buy the cotton and boxes needed for Saturday. He can extend credit to himself by making his workers wait for their pay.

But now suppose that effective demand for socks slumps and the wholesaler cannot place any more with WalMart. This agent delays paying the sweatshop. Its owner has no horde of cash and so cannot pay his labourers or suppliers. Within a couple of weeks, the gates are shut and the workers on their way back to their villages.

At the other extreme, a firm like Boeing must have lines of credit over its long periods of production. Aircraft-manufacturers entered the current crisis with extended credit arrangements. Those necessary precautions encouraged the creation of exotic financial instruments from futures trading and their derivatives because corporations bet (hedged) on future prices of materials and money-capital.

This comparison helps us to see why different kinds of business are failing at different rates. Coastal China

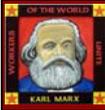
is reeling from the closure of thousands of factories that had been snapping together consumer goods for re-export. As soon as the effective demand dried up, so did their cash flow.

What does re-thinking Marx's analysis provide? Memorising Chapter 12 will not help Warren Buffett to pick a corporation in which to invest. Nor can Marx's investigations allow militants to predict when this or that employer will file for bankruptcy.

The re-thinking clarifies our responses by revealing a pattern beneath the chaos of 'the news'. The roller-coaster is law-bound. Its uneven pace is conditioned by the different time periods for the raising and repayment of money capital.

This scientific approach directs attention from mindless moralising about 'extreme capitalism', 'greed' and 'irrational exuberance'.

Random and immoral events do happen. For example, a firm can go bust because the accountant stole the earnings to buy a Masarati for her toy-boy. But these thefts illumine the Faustian bargain facing every capitalist: to re-invest or to indulge? Too much of the latter risks putting an end to being a capitalist - crisis or no.



"In a paired series of mural-like canvases, titled "Builders" and "Pastimes", the French painter and Communist Fernand Leger (1881-1955) depicted scaffolders as acrobats and circus performers as collective workers. Here, creativity appears as work while work is represented as art, in a world where both jobs and play enrich human capacities. Leger portrayed "new-fangled" human beings, reliant on each other and hence unafraid of machinery or frameworks of steel. For a glimpse of what work should look like, consider the joy in Leger's paintings." (John Berger, *Permanent Red*, Methuen, London, 1960, pp. 121-25.)

Surplus Value is a project of The Praxis Network, a loose community of Marxian thinkers and activists from around Australia. Our initial plan is to build a viable and useful network amongst ourselves. We also trust that others may be interested in joining in this project. To carry this out, we have established this website and an email group for discussions and debate. We also publish a journal (currently on an irregular basis).

Our aims are threefold - to:

- reintroduce class as fundamental to developing political understanding and strategy, particularly for the labour movement to respond to current strategies and tactics of capital in a globalised world.
- reintroduce a materialist approach to our own history and into everyday political practice.
- bring a dialectical approach to our political activity, so that strategies are based on the lives and experiences of everyday Australian people - both workers, and those currently dependent on social security – rather than on a dogmatic assertion of "political truths".

CONTACT:

Surplus Value, c/o PO Box 2063, Ashgrove West, Qld. 4060

Email: contact@surplusvalue.org.au

Website: www.surplusvalue.org.au

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Editorial Thank you. Thank you also to all those Praxis Network members who sent in articles, and other contributions and suggestions. We try to use as much of this material as we can. But we reserve the right to edit articles where necessary to fit the layout of the newsletter. Such editing will be done in a way that, hopefully, doesn't change the essence of the articles. The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the individual members of The Praxis Network.