

A Radical Life

A Memoir by Jim McIlroy

Front cover photo: 1977 — Jim selling at October 22 anti-uranium rally in Sydney.
Back cover photo: 1992 — Coral, Chantal, Katrina and Jim, Brisbane.

Published 2021 by Jim McIlroy
Printed by Red Print: redprint.com.au

Contents

Introduction	7
1. My Early Years	9
Parkdale	9
Mount Eliza	12
Dave Holmes	15
My family	17
Grandparents	18
Armidale	21
Go 'Pies	23
Mentone Grammar School	24
My sporting life	25
Home Front	27
2. Broadening Horizons	29
1964: Trip to the USA	31
University of Melbourne	34
Papua New Guinea adventure	38
Early political involvement	39
1967: Egyptian experience	41
Sojourn in Britain	45
Trip across the world	46
1968: Year of revolutions	52
Personal life	55
1970: Vietnam Moratorium	58
3. Joining the Socialist Movement	61
The early 1970s	64
My teaching career	66
Transfer to Sydney	69

Working for <i>Direct Action</i>	71
Fall of Saigon	73
Meeting Coral & Chantal	75
Transfer to Melbourne	78
Return to Sydney	81
Latin American solidarity	83
Cuba Friendship Brigade	85
Move to Brisbane	86
Darwin holiday	89
Katrina is born	91
 4. Changes in the 1990s	95
Work in the public service	95
Job at Centrelink	97
Green Alliance	100
Howard comes to power	102
Death of my father Ian	105
Asia adventure 2000	106
Historic city of Hue	111
Next stop the Philippines	114
 5. Socialist Alliance Founded	117
My heart operation	120
The family goes to Latin America	124
Remembering history	127
2005: My final year at Centrelink Call	131
2006: Our year in Venezuela	134
Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba	137
Tour of Western Venezuela	140
Nov-Dec Venezuela Brigade	143
Trip to Europe	145
Visit to Pakistan	150
Back in Brisbane	155
 Photographs	159-190
 6. Political Life at Home & Away	191
Labor wins 2007 election	191
Cecily passes away	194
Political work continues	198

Launch of our Venezuela book	200
Return to Venezuela	205
Tour of Cuba with ICAP	208
Venezuela adventures continue	214
Sojourn through Central America	217
The wonders of Palenque	221
El Salvador in the balance	224
FMLN victory	227
7. The Chasing Chavez saga	230
May Day brigade 2009	234
Postcard from Central America	238
Politics back in Brisbane	242
Promotion of the Chavez film	243
Daniel and Yoly's tour	244
Debate in the DSP over directions	245
Distributing <i>Green Left Weekly</i>	250
Brisbane events and campaigns	251
8. 2010 Federal Elections	254
Collingwood premiers!	259
Coral returns	260
<i>Green Left's</i> 20th anniversary	261
Why 'ecosocialism'	264
Queensland elections	271
Venezuela film launched	271
My background recounted	277
9. Return to Caracas	280
Our South American journey	282
Letters from Latin America 2012	283
10. Life Back in Australia	305
Legacy of Chavez	306
Senate election campaign 2013	309
SA: What kind of party?	311
<i>Green Left</i> reaches 1000 issues	316
11. Green Left Goes Full Color	321
GLW sub drive 2015	322

My 70th birthday 324

Green Left as a 'scaffolding' 325

12. Postscript 333

Appendix: A Summary of My Life Up to the 1970s 334

Suburban beginnings 334

Vietnam & conscription 336

Joining the socialist movement 339



Jim in later 1970s.

Introduction

When the youth radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s swept through Australia and the rest of the world more than half a century ago, I was convinced and inspired to join in with a large section of my generation. I was also pushed — being conscripted as a 20-year-old in 1966 to be sent off as part of the Australian Liberal-Country Party government's involvement in the US invasion and occupation of Vietnam.

Although I wasn't sent in the end, I was radicalised by the tumultuous events of the anti-Vietnam War movement, and as a result became an anti-war activist, and a committed Marxist and socialist revolutionary. I joined the Socialist Youth Alliance/Socialist Workers Party (later Democratic Socialist Party), and became a full-time organiser and journalist for the socialist newspaper *Direct Action*.

From my birthplace in Melbourne, I was transferred to Sydney, and later lived and organised for 25 years in Brisbane. I was a founding member of the Socialist Alliance when it was formed in 2000, and regular writer for and distributor of the socialist publication *Green Left Weekly*.

Along with Coral Wynter, I became deeply involved in the international solidarity movement for the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, visiting several times and living for a year in Caracas in 2006.

This book is a memoir, and a documentation, of my life and times, from the early years, till my return to Sydney in the 2010s. It is the story of someone who dedicated himself to the struggle for socialism as a life-work and a career.

As capitalism enters its final crisis, as an existential threat to humanity and the survival of the planet, the question of “socialism or barbarism” is posed ever more starkly. In my opinion, there is nothing more worthwhile to do with one's life right now than to struggle for an eco-socialist future.



This memoir could be titled: *Jim McIlroy: A Radical Life, The First 70 Years*. It essentially deals with the period from my early childhood, through education and growing political

awareness to a lifetime of activism, in various parts of Australia and around the world, up to my return to Sydney in the early 2010s, ending in the mid-2010s.

There is considerable coverage of the travels made internationally, but especially in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America. The development of solidarity with revolutionary movements around the world has always been a major concern of mine.

The latter sections of the memoir are different to the first part. They consist mainly of writings, documents, email correspondence and political statements dealing with my views on, and involvement in, some of the major questions facing socialist program and organisation in the Socialist Alliance and the progressive movement more generally in recent years.

This memoir is by no means a complete record of my life and times, and certainly not a general history of the socialist movement in Australia over these years. Hopefully, it gives some insight into the personal career of one activist, whose life parallels the ups and downs of the socialist movement in this country over the past half century.

I would like to thank those various family members who read the draft and made various suggestions for improvements. I would also like to acknowledge those such as Peter Boyle and Pip Hinman who provided photos for the book.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful contribution of my immediate family, Coral, Chantal and Katrina, in loving and supporting me in all aspects of my life.

Finally, I give overwhelming thanks to my old friend and comrade Dave Holmes for the layout and preparation for publication of this memoir.

This memoir is dedicated to my dear parents Cecily and Ian, who raised me in a caring and humanist atmosphere, which gave me the basis for my later commitment to working for a socialist future.

Jim McIlroy

May 2021

1. My Early Years

I was born on February 12, 1946, in Hawthorn, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; parents Ian and Cecily (nee Wright). We soon moved to the Port Phillip Bay seaside suburb of Parkdale, a mainly working class area in those days.

My first conscious memory is of toddling out the front gate of our modest white, weatherboard house, and somehow managing to get across busy Beach Road, which ran down beside the cliff front filled with ti-trees at the end of our street, Foam Street, with my parents running in panic behind me. I somehow survived the traffic.

Over the next four years, I soon found myself with three siblings — Fiona (Fi), Robert (Bob), and Frances (Fran). We were later reportedly regarded as the ideal Spockian family — boy, girl, boy, girl, each a year or 18 months apart.

(Dr Benjamin Spock was the guru of the planned and orderly middle-class family of the post-World War II era.) We were seen as an ideal happy family of the time — this image was largely true, but masked marital tensions and conflicts, which later became much more apparent.

Parkdale

I have some vague memories of attending the Parkdale Kindergarten, at St Aidans Church near our home. I certainly have fond memories of my time at Parkdale State School.

Parkdale State was a mainly working-class public school, with students from a wide variety of backgrounds, reflecting the growing migrant population of urban Australia in the post-war years.

My best friends of the mid-1950s included Mick Tapson, son of an English migrant family who lived next door to us in Foam Street, and Igor Vorman, whose mother was a single parent from Latvia, who lived in a shack on the other side of our house. I always cherish her kindness in making us her version of icecreams, which consisted of

a rolled-up paper cone filled with white sugar!

Trips to the milk bar down on the Beach Road to buy a Milky Way or a penny iceblock were also a feature of those days.

I also played hide and seek with my friends on the cliffs above the beach, while my sisters played hopscotch in the street.

Collecting swappies (swap-cards) was another favorite past-time of all the children in the street in the 1950s.

Opposite our house in Foam Street lived Molly, with her herd of goats. Animals and chooks in the back yard were normal suburban activities at that time.

Somehow I managed to avoid some of the injuries such as broken arms and legs which most children suffered at some stage. However, I incurred a serious, deep cut on my knee, which bled profusely, after jumping onto a chunk of broken glass hidden in long grass by the roadside outside Molly's place. The scar is still there on my knee to this day.

One somewhat darker side of our activities was the cubby house we kids established in an attic of a shed nearby, where we hid objects we had purloined from the back garage of an elderly recluse who lived around the corner — including an old air-rifle. I clearly remember the humiliation I suffered when our secret was discovered, my other friends fled, and I was forced by my parents to visit the old man and apologise for our misdemeanours.

My friends and I were also part of a gang in competition with other groups of boys, who hung out among the ti-tree bushes on the cliffs above the beach at Parkdale. I wonder what happened to all those boys at Parky, and where they are now.

Swimming in the cold waters of Port Phillip Bay was a regular part of our summer activities. We would often have to avoid stingrays and jellyfish, but didn't seem to have a major problem with sharks.

I did swimming lessons with Parkdale State School, but I didn't become a very strong swimmer in flat water.

Another part of my childhood there was membership of the 2nd Mordialloc Boy Scouts troop (actually the Cubs).

I gained badges for tying knots, and various other arcane skills (which are now almost totally forgotten). I also recall playing games, including a form of (unarmed) guerrilla warfare involving crawling through the bush at night to try to reach our destination without being captured.

The Scouts chanted "Dib, Dib, Dob, Dob, Akela!" and had the motto, "Be prepared!" The Scouts originated as a militaristic youth movement, established by Lord Douglas Baden-Powell to train servants of the British Empire, but in its modern

form probably does little harm and some good for young people today.

Around the same time (year 5 or 6), my parents got me involved briefly in boxing. I fought my friend Mick Tapson in a half-hearted way over a few rounds. I don't think either of us got too injured out of it all.

I recollect doing pretty well in studies at primary school, and relished the elephant and koala stamps we received from the teachers for any good work in English, geography or arithmetic. I also broke my little finger trying to take a sharp catch during a cricket match on the huge back yard of Parkdale State School when I was nine or ten years old.

One clear memory is of the brutal games of British Bulldogs almost the whole school used to play at lunchtime, involving a couple of unfortunate students having to catch and tag other children as they dashed across the grassy yard at the back of the school.

I also have a strong, but blurred, memory of the Great Potato Glut of the mid 1950s, which meant you could get all the chips you could eat for only a penny!

Christmases at our place, number 2 Foam Street, involved various uncles and aunts playing games with us in the yard and the street outside. In particular, one uncle used to climb up onto the roof of the garage and do tricks for us.

In addition, I do recall having tantrum attacks occasionally, during which I broke the wire screen door and went and hid under the house for an hour or two, in outrage at some real or imagined human rights violation by my parents or siblings.

Our family had a white cat, unsurprisingly named Mrs White, who acted as the real matriarch of the household. Unfortunately, she suffered a nasty demise, becoming impaled on the wooden fence separating our house from next door. So, we obtained another white cat, named Mrs White 2!

Our father, Ian, had a modified Holden utility car, with a home-made wooden and canvas cover on the back. I recall our uncle Karl Feller did a painting of the vehicle with us McIlroy kids in the back.

One high point of my primary school years was provided by the Melbourne Olympic Games of 1956, when I had my first big trip out by myself, traveling by train to Olympic Park to see India and Pakistan play in the hockey.

That year represents the first political memories I have of the popular Hungarian Revolution against Russian control, and the Suez Crisis, in which Egypt nationalised the Canal, and Britain, France and Israel invaded in a failed attempt to prevent it.

Another part of my education in the primary years was music. At school, I learned the recorder, and became part of the Parkdale State School recorder band. We competed in the Victorian state schools competition, and ended up gaining second

prize one year, if my memory serves me right.

I later taught myself to play the mouth organ, and can still manage a few Australian folk songs and an Irish jig or two, as a party trick.

I also learned piano while in Parkdale. I fondly recall my music teacher, Mrs Dulcie Hill, who lived around the corner from us in Parkers Road, trying to improve my technique. “Jamie, your bridge, mind your bridge!” she would say, tapping me on the knuckles with a wooden ruler, to attempt to get me to hold my hands higher on the keyboard.

I ended up learning piano up to the Second Grade level, I think. I attended some classes at the Conservatorium at Melbourne University. But I never advanced very far with my music, except for some half-baked experimentation with jazz piano at a later stage for a while.

My favorite pieces included Haydn waltzes and Tchaikovsky’s Peter and the Wolf. It’s always a pity when children (like myself) learn the piano at a young age, lose interest with the practicing in their teenage years and fail to go on with it in later life.

Mount Eliza

During 1957, the family moved from Parkdale to Mount Eliza, a more middle-class, semi-rural (in those days) suburb further down the Mornington Peninsula, just past Frankston.

I attended Mount Eliza State School for half a year, where I first met Dave Holmes, my later best friend at school. I loved the country-style setting of Mt Eliza State, with its huge bush backyard, where the kids found snakes, among other wildlife.

I recollect one minor escapade, in which I had a small rebellion against authority by ringing the school bell early, and bringing everyone out for morning tea before time.

I got the cuts (the strap) for that episode, but was happy anyway.

We used to play great games of hide-and-seek in the bushland around the school. I also played wicketkeeper in the school cricket team, at Frankston oval among other places.

One memory I have is of our class head-teacher, who used to smoke a lot, and insisted on cutting his nicotine-stained fingernails in class.

The family acquired a dog, named Tubby, of course, because he was so skinny. He was a real mongrel, but had a deal of greyhound in him, as well as Queensland blue heeler, it was reputed.

He was very fast, but not very smart. I used to watch him from the window of our new house in Mount Eliza, chasing the rabbits, which were rife there in those days. The rabbit would run and then suddenly turn left toward his burrow. Tubby would turn right, and lose the bunny completely.

Tubby had the honor of winning the “Dog with the Nicest Smile” competition at the Mount Eliza local show, as he always had his mouth open wide and tongue hanging out.

One amazing example of Tubby’s speed and endurance was later on, when we used to spend weekends at our grandparents’ country house in Woori Yallock, near Lilydale north of Melbourne. One day, the family was driving in to buy some groceries at the Woori Yallock store, some miles from the house along the unmade Sheep Station Creek Road.

I looked back and saw the intrepid Tubby, all covered in dust, running behind the car, as he thought we were leaving him behind. He must have run several miles at full speed. We children brought him into the car and smothered the poor lad with hugs.

Us kids were mostly loving to Tubby, but also could be a bit unkind, such as when we tied him to a tree and then ran the lead around another tree, so that it was just out of reach of a bowl of dogfood. He only had to go back and around the second tree to get the food, but of course ran around and around the tree till he was tied up tightly by the neck. Kids can be cruel at times!

We also had a blue budgerigar, which eventually came to a sticky end when he was crushed when our Mum pulled a two-way drawer through to the other side, with the unfortunate bird perched on the other edge.

Further on Woori Yallock, my grandfather George and grandmother Clare lived for a period in a large military surplus tent on a block there, which we visited on occasions. They later moved into a house not far away, until George eventually died in 1955, partly from his war wounds.

Gran Clare continued to spend time at the Woori Yallock house, where we would stay regularly. We came to experience the bush and nature in those years, which had a lasting impression on me.

Our house in Boundary (later Canadian Bay) Road, Mount Eliza, was a modern, two-storey building, designed in the most contemporary, modernist style of the time by our uncle Karl Feller. Karl was a prominent architect with a large firm in Melbourne, who specialised in planning hospitals.

Karl was married to our aunt on my father’s side, Betty (nee Imes). Betty was a matriarchal figure, who was famous for being one of the first women pharmacists in Australia, and owned chemist shops in Prahran and South Melbourne.

The shops were famous for displaying the sign, going back to Betty's father's days as a chemist: "Imes' pill: The pill that will!"

They were both very kind to us McIlroy kids, and we spent a lot of time with our cousins, Michael (my age), Erika (Fiona's age), and Madeleine (Fran's age). I have fond memories of the hours and hours I spent playing all sorts of outside and inside games with Michael, at Mount Eliza and at the Feller family's historic mansion at Mercer Road, Armadale.

As teenagers, we spent more and more time together, when the Fellers bought a holiday home in Mount Eliza as well. I ended up crewing for Michael on his Gwen 12 yacht (a type known as the Flying Bathtub), at nearby Davey's Bay Yacht Club.

We were only moderately successful with our racing at the club. My memory is of "bottling" (tipping over) quite a few times, in the rough seas and fluky winds of Port Phillip Bay. The water was always freezing, especially around Easter time — I liken our experiences to that of the "Murmansk run" by Allied sailors supplying the Soviet army during World War II. Reportedly, if their ships were sunk by German U-Boats, they only survived a minute or two in the freezing waters. We were always very quick to swim to the centreboard and get the boat upright again as soon as possible.

I recollect doing the "crew-skipper race" one year, in which the skipper (Michael) and crew (me) swapped places. We never got very far, as a big wave pushed the yacht back onto the sand and stove in the stern, putting us out of the race before we had even started! So much for my great maritime career.

One regret: A boy named Jeff Kennett also raced a yacht at Davey's Bay. I could have pulled the bung out of his boat one day, and maybe Victoria would have been saved from the scourge of the Kennett Liberal regime three decades later. But who was to know that that pimply teenager would one day be premier of the state?

We built a runway through the bush down to the creek at the bottom of our three-acre block, and running a home-made billy cart with Michael down the track, at breakneck speed and at great risk to life and limb.

On more than one occasion, we overshot the turn and the billy cart ended up in the small creek on the bottom of the hill.

We also used to play with Dinky Toy mini-racing cars, and with soldiers, cavalry and other military toys on the clay pit at the front of the house. I had great fun constructing plastic kit Spitfires, Messerschmitts, Stukas and other warplanes, and playing ferocious war games inside and outside the house.

Despite all these war games, it didn't seem to make me a warmonger in later life: in fact, I became a strong opponent of the wars fought by imperialist powers against their competitors or Third World countries.

Apart from Michael, I also became friends with other boys from his circle — especially John Edquist, and Michael's cousin Peter Singer, now the prominent ethical philosopher and animal liberationist. All of them were students at the upper crust private school Scotch College.

We spent time with them at the beach, including water-skiing behind Peter's family speedboat off Ranelagh Beach, near our place in Boundary Road.

At various stages, I was given a flat-water surf board to paddle on, and later a white, plastic (coolite) yacht to sail off the beaches in our area. We did have an active outdoor life in those days (before the advent of computers or even TV in our house).

We McIlroy kids were only allowed to watch TV during school holiday times, when our parents rented a television for a few weeks. Maybe, that made me a bit of a teleholic later in life.

I also played a few rounds of golf with Michael at the Caulfield Golf Course, not far from the Feller family home in Malvern.

Dave Holmes

My friendship with Dave Holmes developed strongly during those early years at Mount Eliza. We spent a lot of time at each other's houses and around the place.

We played table tennis together, and became quite good at it over the years. Dave grew big pumpkins in the family garden, following his father's example, and even entered them in local shows. I tried my hand at gardening, but less ambitiously, producing nice silverbeet and beans, if I remember correctly.

Dave's father, Charles Holmes, was the editor of the travel journal *Walkabout*, and apparently a Liberal Party supporter. He would always try to stir me when I visited the Holmes' household by showing me the framed photo of himself with Robert Menzies, but mainly as a joke.

Dave and I were becoming increasingly progressive-minded in our thinking, but in a fairly abstract way. We discussed philosophical and religious issues at length, but had no real ideological framework at that stage, as inquiring teenagers.

On the question of religion, neither of us were true believers. However, my Gran used to take me to the occasional church service at the tiny, historic Anglican church of St James the Less, where I enjoyed the organ music especially. Maybe, it was the name of the church which appealed to me at the time!

Dave and I used to walk a lot, and also ride our bikes, including a long ride over the Red Hill range down the Mornington Peninsula to Flinders, where there was a milk

bar with what seemed to us the best milkshakes in Melbourne. We used to race each other down the long hill to that shop to get those chocolate milkshakes, as a reward for our efforts.

We used to play shuttlecock in the Holmes' backyard, as well as tennis at the club near our house in Canadian Bay Road.

One major event, in 1958, was the making of the film *On the Beach*, from the well-known book by Neville Shute, at Canadian Bay itself. The Hollywood film starred Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Robert Helpmann and other famous actors.

Things were more basic in film-making in those days, and the actors just had caravans on the cliff above the beach. The film is famous for supposedly provoking Ava Gardner to proclaim, "Melbourne is the ideal place to make a film about the end of the world."

Whether or not that incident actually took place, we did see her swearing at being made to re-enact the scene about her yacht tipping over several times. Dave and I were in fact on the beach during one of the crowd scenes in the movie.

Dave and I also became interested in science, and science fiction, together at school. We decided to try to construct a home-made rocket ship, using a metal tube and a concoction of rocket fuel – namely ammonium nitrate (from garden fertiliser), charcoal, sulphur and sugar, all mixed up and heated over a Bunsen burner, in Dave's father's back shed. This explosive and highly dangerous experiment nearly set the shed on fire when it exploded one time.

We did finally succeed eventually in creating our rocket fuel, filling the tube with it and placing the "rocket" on a platform for firing. Unfortunately, the rocket failed to take off, and merely burned into a black mess on the ground.

Another dangerous scientific "experiment" I attempted was to fill glass test tubes with glycerine, add nitric acid, place on a tree and throw stones at it until it made a flash. We were very lucky that our attempt at home-made nitro-glycerine (the essential component of dynamite) failed, or I might not be here to tell the tale now.

In younger days, we also liked to set off fireworks on Guy Fawkes Day, November 5, and other holidays. Fireworks were legally available then, and kids used to fire off rockets, penny bangers and Catherine wheels at will.

I do remember us kids being naughty by going around to a couple of unpopular teachers' houses and letting off double bangers inside their letterboxes.

When we had first moved to Mount Eliza in 1957, I helped my dad flatten out the clay mound left at the front of the house, which was mounted on pylons with a large open basement downstairs. In that basement we played ball games, including hockey.

On one occasion my pink-colored dental plate fell out and was smashed to bits by

a wild swing of a hockey stick.

Later on, Ian built his tool shed and workroom in part of the basement. Ian was an inventor in his spare time, in addition to his profession as a meteorological physicist with CSIRO's Division of Atmospheric Physics at Aspendale, further up the bay toward the city.

Among other implements he made a bicycle with wooden boards for the feet, to overcome the need for chains and gears. It never took off unfortunately.

My family

As I said before, my father Ian was a scientist by profession, working for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). He had attended school at University High, graduated in science, and then was sent off to World War II, as a technical officer with the rank of captain, eventually becoming one of the early experts in radar.

He says that while posted to the radar station at Burleigh Heads, Queensland, he and his colleagues actually spotted the Japanese mini-submarines on their way to attack Sydney Harbour. But, as radar was still not fully understood by the military hierarchy, their warnings were not acted upon. Ian also spent a period in New Guinea.

During the war, Ian met Cecily, who had been educated at New England Girls Grammar School (NEGGS) in Armidale, and later completed a social work degree in Sydney. They married in 1945, and I was born in February 1946.

Ian and Cecily were both progressive minded. Ian later became secretary of the Peace Action Campaign, one of the anti-war organisations of the 1950s. I would use the boxes and boxes of PAC letterhead paper Ian had left over for many of my juvenile drawings and scribblings later on.

My father stayed involved in the peace and anti-nuclear movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and later, and also joined the ALP, becoming a local office-holder in Mornington branch later in life. He was also involved in the local peace committee in the area.

Cecily, as was the way of the time, interrupted her career to become a homemaker and carer for us children from the 1940s onwards. She was not able to try to restart her social work employment until the later 1960s.

She was a wonderful mother to all us kids. She taught us a humane approach to life, although she could be stern with us also at times.

In retrospect, I regret not sufficiently understanding and empathising with her

dilemma in giving up her career for the family at the time. The patriarchal system was just regarded as normal in those days, until challenged by the rise of the second wave of feminism in the later 1960s.

Cec became a strong feminist, and a fierce defender of the rights of women. It wasn't until later that I understood the real sacrifices she had made for us children.

Fiona, my first sister, worked as a teacher, as well as being a poet and a singer. She has always been a romantic, and dreamer about the future. I remember discussing the meaning of life, etc., with her at various times, but particularly one time when we both worked a holiday job picking apples at an orchard in Red Hill during late school.

Bob was a very practical boy, and matter of fact. He became a musician-songwriter as time went by. He was also an idealist. This was shown later in life when he became a hippy farmer at Bonang in East Gippsland.

Fran, the youngest, is the most sociable of us, always talking and laughing. She is also a writer and a singer, most recently with the Solidarity and Trade Union Choirs in Sydney.

All in all, my family was a positive environment in which to grow up, and I was very happy in my early days with them all. I thank each of them for their love and support to me as I began my journey through life.

Ian worked at the CSIRO Division of Atmospheric Physics at Aspendale, further up the coast of Port Phillip Bay from our home in Mount Eliza. I used to visit there fairly regularly, and marvel at the gadgets and things they had.

His speciality was studying evaporation, in particular the use of lysimeters — which were huge concrete pots full of earth, planted with various crops, sunk into the ground on scales to measure changes in water content of the soil under various conditions.

As a younger child, I enjoyed the Christmas parties held there, with Santa arriving in a van full of presents for the families of the CSIRO workers. I recall Ian's co-workers, including his boss Bill Swinbank and others such as Andre Berson.

It is an abiding shame that, in a world facing catastrophic climate change, Ian's life work aimed at limiting water evaporation from crops, regenerating forests, etc., was never completely fulfilled. And the planet will be the worse off for that fact.

Grandparents

My grandfather on my father's side, George McIlroy, had been a World War I ANZAC veteran from the Gallipoli debacle, when he reportedly was the captain given the task

of waking up all the stragglers in the trenches when the withdrawal from Gallipoli was ordered. He later won the Military Cross for his exploits on the Western Front during the European campaign.

It is ironical that the battle of Gallipoli — in fact, a brilliant victory for the Turkish forces over the British Empire — is now celebrated as Australia's finest military hour. Although George did attend ANZAC ceremonies, he was no warmonger.

I'm sure that his opposition to war was a very early influence over my own views. I still have his Military Cross, as part of the family heirlooms, and keep it in his memory.

George was an old-fashioned small entrepreneur, and ran a country newspaper for a while, and then set up a brickworks at Lilydale in partnership with another man. The family is convinced my grandmother, Clare, was swindled out of part of her inheritance by this bloke, but we have no proof.

My Gran was a gentle soul, descended from a respectable English family, the Cumberlands. After George died, quite young, in his mid 50s, partly of health problems from the war, she became involved in the Blue Rinse Set of Camberwell, the most genteel, bridge-playing group of middle-class women, mainly also widows.

These women were very conservative-minded, all avid supporters of that old Tory-loving throwback, Sir Robert Menzies, the longstanding and reactionary Liberal Prime Minister of Australia right through the 1950s till the mid 1960s.

While Clare was no radical, she was opposed to war, and especially to conscription for overseas service (going back to the anti-conscription movement of World War I).

When in 1965 Menzies introduced conscription of 20 year olds as part of the preparation for Australia's intervention into the Vietnam War, Clare was outraged.

When I, her oldest grandchild, was conscripted in February 1966, on my 20th birthday, she argued strongly with the other bridge-players against the war, and never voted Liberal again, until her death in 1974.

I have a vivid recollection of Clare, at her country house in Woori Yallock, calling all her grandchildren to Morning Fruit, which was undoubtedly very good for our diets at the time. She was also an expert at drumming her fingers on the table, and singing *Oh, What a Beautiful Morning* in a fine soprano voice.

Christmas was a major institution for our extended family. Christmas Day was usually spent at one of the elegant homes owned by members of the family — either the beautiful Feller home in Malvern or the Cumberland home in Camberwell. Our place in Mount Eliza was usually too far away from town for the many elderly aunts and uncles.

Clare came from the Cumberland family of 12 children, many of whom attended

the lavish Christmas dinners. After a sumptuous meal, the present giving by one of the uncles, Jack or Joe, dressed as Santa, was always a huge event.

All the older relatives would give us kids a present, often a bright new two-shilling piece or a toy or something, and we would collect our loot in little piles in a corner somewhere.

My own present buying was also an institution. Maybe it helped establish my lifelong habit as a penny-pincher, but I would invariably make a list, from immediate family to all other children, and spend a couple of hours in Coles or Woolworths, carefully selecting the most appropriate and value-for-money gifts.

Sometimes, we spent the Christmas party at the inner city home of Arthur and Clemency Game and their children, our cousins. The Games were another branch of the extended family, as Clemency was Betty's cousin.

Included among the elderly relatives were Uncle Len, who always breathed very heavily as a result of being gassed on the Western Front during World War I; the ever-calm Auntie Pearl; Uncle Joe, the optometrist, who always said to us kids, "Don't put anything bigger than your fist in your eyes"; Auntie Rene, who became obsessive about washing her hands all the time; Auntie Mavis, a social high-flyer; and Uncle Jack, the jokester.

An important part of our Christmas history was the regular trips we made with the Feller family to their rented holiday house in Point Lonsdale, on the Bellarine Peninsula, on the western side of Port Phillip Bay. Point Lonsdale had a great surf beach, where we spent most of our daylight hours together.

In those days, there was little understanding of the dangers of skin cancer, so we spent many hours in the surf, with little sunscreen protection apart from some zinc cream on our noses. Accordingly, we burned red raw in the sun, and suffered mightily from painful sunburn at night.

In the course of these summers, I became quite proficient as a body surfer, although I never attempted board surfing. While I am only a moderate swimmer, I enjoy body surfing to this day, as one of life's little pleasures.

We also used to play cards, mainly 500 or Canasta, till late at night at the house. Other games us teenagers enjoyed included Monopoly and Ludo.

Once, when staying with my cousin Michael in the bungalow next to the house, we stayed up late at night competing to see who could kill the most mosquitoes with a rolled up newspaper, delighting in creating little splotches of red blood on the walls of the room. The winning catch ran into the hundreds I believe.

In this period I became a big jazz music fan, especially of popular bands like the Dave Brubeck Quartet and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Later I graduated to modern jazz greats like Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

At Point Lonsdale, we used to attend dance nights at the local Surf Club. This was my early introduction to socialising with girls, under the ultraviolet lights, which made your white shirt go all purple.

As to girl friends, I was a rather shy boy at that time (still am). I had various crushes on girls at school, going back to primary. At Mentone Grammar, we used to attend dance classes with the girls from our sister school, Mentone Girls Grammar, but I never had a real girlfriend at that time.

I remember the race that occurred when the dance teacher would call out to allow the boys to rush across the hall to ask favoured girls to dance with them on those nights. I was usually a bit slow and backward in those races, but in any case I enjoyed dancing with all the girls, and learning dances, such as the Parma Waltz, the Quick Step and the Progressive Barn Dance, not to mention the adventurous Tango.

My “dates” at home in Mount Eliza included Mary and Belinda, whom I accompanied to the pictures (movies), but I admit advanced no further than a kiss on the way home. I was too embarrassed to ask for any further intimacy, for fear of rejection.

In the early 1960s, during my last years at school, we used to attend the big Jazz Dances held in the various town halls of Melbourne’s middle-class eastern suburbs, such as Malvern, Camberwell and St Kilda. There would regularly be 500 or more well-dressed youth there, known as Jazzers.

We boys would wear stovepipe trousers, luminous green or pink socks and winklepicks shoes. I later swore off the luminous socks after hearing the radiation from them would weaken your ankles!

Invariably, when you got outside there would be a group of Fonzie look-alikes, with motorbikes or hotted-up FJ Holdens. They were the largely working-class Rockers, from the Western suburbs. This phenomenon later morphed into the Mods (on Vespa scooters) versus Rockers tribal competition.

Armidale

The other branch of our family were the Wright dynasty of the Armidale, New England, region of northern NSW. These were the relatives of my mother, Cecily.

The Wrights were/are a pastoral, squatter family who originally settled in the area in the late 19th century. The early story is told by my godmother, the well-known poet Judith Wright, in her book, *Generations of Men*.

The Wrights owned large tracts of land north-east of Armidale, and grazed sheep,

cattle and horses for decades on the relatively fertile grasslands of the area. The Wright family were scions of the local establishment.

For a number of summers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the McIlroy family would trek up to Armidale for a holiday, sometimes in a car and caravan we borrowed from members of the Game family who lived in country Balranald, in southern NSW.

I clearly remember the traffic jams on Australia's underdeveloped roads of the time, and the cars stopped by the roadside because of boiled radiators. We would somehow make it up the steep incline of the Moonbi Ranges, just outside Tamworth, and arrive at our New England destination.

The properties we stayed at included *Dyamberin*, owned by Brud Wright (Cecily's brother) and his English wife; *Springfield*, owned by Tina Warwick (Cecily's sister) and her husband Peter; and *Wongwibinda* (owned by Owen Wright and family).

All the Wright family members were accomplished horse-riders. Our cousins all had their bedspreads made out of ribbons they had won at the Armidale Show or elsewhere — blue for first, red for second, and white for third. They looked exquisite.

Us McIlroy kids were also horse-riders to an extent, and had attended the riding school in Mount Eliza. Fiona was the keenest and best of us. She had her own horses, Silver and then Marinka, at home, and had competed in the Mornington Show. She had even once ridden in the fours at the Royal Melbourne Show!

I was pretty hopeless as a rider, and not that keen really. However, I had to face up to my duty when on holiday in Armidale

Once, Uncle Brud said one day, "Oh, Jim, we don't seem to have any quiet horses for you today. This one is OK, but you need to be a bit careful as he does have a tendency to bolt sometimes."

"Oh, oh," I thought. "Here comes trouble."

Sure enough, I could feel him wanting to make a run for home all the time, so I kept his head firmly pointed away from the homestead, and rode him for several miles away in the distance, hoping he would forget about it all.

When I finally had to turn for home, of course, he bolted. He ran like the wind, with me hanging on for dear life, with my arms around his neck, as he tried to brush me off on low-lying tree branches.

Eventually, we arrived at the home gate, and I thought he was going to try to jump the fence. But, no, he stopped suddenly, sending me flying over his head and onto the grass. Luckily all that was seriously injured was my pride.

Nevertheless, we had wonderful times at our Armidale country cousins' places, and it helped give me a love and appreciation of the Australian bush, with its pleasures and its hardships.

My grandfather and grandmother on Cecily's side were a lovely old couple, who were very kind to us kids. Grandpa Cecil would make ginger beer from a plant he kept in a shed, and Grandma Madeleine would make us porridge with brown sugar and fresh cream from the family dairy, with strawberries. It was delicious!

Cecil used to regularly listen to the ABC Country Hour on the old radio in the living room.

I remember various incidents from our trips there: including almost treading on a giant snake in the bush one day, which luckily had its head down a hole. And once again having my dental plate kicked out of my mouth when carrying a big, struggling spring lamb to be dropped in the arsenic dip. I saw the dental plate spiral over and over, and land with a plop in the evil-looking, yellow liquid sheep dip. Needless to say, I never tried to get it back!

Go 'Pies!

From an early age, I was a fanatical supporter of Collingwood (Australian Rules) Football Club, the Mighty Magpies. I'm not exactly sure how that came about, as I was actually born in the toffee-nosed suburb of Hawthorn, but allegedly my father used to travel through working-class Collingwood regularly in the early days.

Maybe I imbibed the atmosphere of the legendary Victoria Park footy ground, the Magpies' home ground in those days, from going past it often in my early childhood. In any case, barracking for a football team has always been a tribal passion in Melbourne.

Actually, I used to attend matches at the Melbourne Cricket Ground quite a bit, as my Gran had a women's and children's membership ticket with the MCG. This was Melbourne Football Club's home ground, so I saw both cricket and football matches there.

In fact, I had the privilege of watching the 'Pies defeat Melbourne in the 1958 grand final. Boy, was that a rough game, with Collingwood stalwarts like Murray Weideman and Ray Gabelich putting the pressure on the Melbourne stars.

Unfortunately, and as a matter of some shame for a died-in-the-wool Magpie supporter like myself, I have never seen another of Collingwood's many grand final appearances in person since then — only on TV.

It has taken decades for the Magpies to recover from the narrow losses of 1964 and 1966, and the 1970 defeat by arch-enemy Carlton — which initiated the infamous label "Colliwobbles" for our failures in the last quarters of grand finals.

More on Collingwood later.

Mentone Grammar School

From 1958, I attended Mentone Boys Grammar School, a middle-class private school in a seaside suburb of the bay. The students there were mostly from lower middle-class backgrounds, with fathers who were chemists, butchers and other professionals and small business people.

The school fancied itself as having rising aspirations to join the elite group of upper-class public schools, like Melbourne Grammar, who belonged to the Associated Public Schools (APS), for sports and other purposes. But it currently resided in the group of Associated Grammar Schools (AGS), like Camberwell Grammar, which was on a lower status level.

Dave Holmes, myself and another friend from Mount Eliza used to travel, using a parental car pool, to Frankston Station, and then by red-rattler train to Mentone, a trip of about half-an-hour (15 kilometres). Those train trips were rather raucous, with a big mixture of students from all kinds of schools, high schools and private — as well as boys and girls, from single or mixed sex schools. My sisters went to the nearby Mentone Girls' Grammar.

There was also the mixture among the private schools between Anglican (like Mentone GS), and Catholic (like the nearby St Bedes College). However, I don't remember much mixing between them, as the Catholic-Protestant sectarian divide was very strong in those days.

I remember doing fairly well in my studies at Mentone. There was essentially a three-way competition between myself, Dave Holmes and another boy, Michael Bell, for top marks in class, with one or other of us coming out first. In those days we were able to get high 90s marks out of 100 for English, mathematics, geography, history or science on a regular basis.

I once surprised myself by gaining 100 % for Divinity (religious studies). From that day on, I have prided myself by being able to match quotes from the Bible with any religious zealots I have run into.

On the subject of religion, in our mid-teens, Dave and I discussed the question of God, etc., at length. We came down to the rather pragmatic position, at that stage, that although we were agnostic about God's existence, we had better take out an insurance policy and become confirmed Anglicans, just in case, after we died, it turned out He did exist. Later on, of course, we firmed up as Marxists and atheists.

One of the main things you always remember about school is the teachers, and their various nicknames and eccentricities. From Mentone, I remember Domo, the deputy head who was bald as a bandicoot (we used to wonder if he used Brasso to shine the top of his head); Mr (Gangrene) Greening, the English teacher, who used to make a habit of rushing into the classroom, often in his yellow raincoat in wet weather, jumping out the open window, then coming around and in again, just to catch our attention; our French teacher Luigi (who was French, and prided himself on being “tough,” because of his experience as paratrooper in the French army assisting Israel in 1956); the teacher who used to read the racing guide in class, and issue tips to the students about possible winners; our science teacher, Mr Sibley, who once responded to a spillage of concentrated hydrochloric acid in the laboratory by drilling holes in the wooden floor to allow the steaming liquid to drip into the ground below; and Mr Anwyl, another of my English teachers, who was very helpful with my understanding of English language and literature.

There was also our headmaster in the later years, Keith Jones, who was very ambitious for the future of the school, and keen for us to succeed in academic and sporting endeavours. I remember joining with Dave and other Matriculation year students in discussing various topics in the garden right outside the headmaster's window, knowing that he was probably listening to us behind the curtains.

By that stage, Dave and I had become more progressive in our thinking, if not a tad rebellious, against the class strictures of the private school education system.

One incident I recollect was during an English class taken by Mr Jones, I complained to him about the poor lighting in the classroom, because I was having trouble seeing the blackboard from the back of the class. It turned out it was my own eyesight which was the problem, and I soon found I had to get eyeglasses for short-sightedness.

My sporting life

Sports were always a big issue at our school. My speciality was hockey, in which I played at left half-back for the Mentone Grammar team. While in football and cricket, MGS was part of the AGS group of grammar schools, in the smaller sport of hockey, we played in one big league, with the prestigious public schools as well as some high schools.

I remember we had two big boys, migrants from Eastern Europe, who were the full backs. While many of us liked to strengthen our sticks by wrapping copper wire around them, covered with plastic tape, just to be lairs, (totally illegal), these two liked

best of all to undercut the 16-yard hits and send the ball flying head-high the length of the field and out the other end into the surrounding suburban streets.

Someone then had to go and look for it. This was regarded as great fun by all of us!

One day, I thought I was a murderer and would have to go to jail for the rest of my life. I undercut the ball from a free hit. It struck a large tuft of grass, flew up into the air, and hit an opposing player right in the forehead.

He dropped down as if dead, and was carried off. Fortunately, he recovered shortly afterward, and sat on the sideline with a huge egg-shaped bruise on his forehead — and I was saved from life imprisonment!

I was a reasonable hockey player, and at the age of 15-16, was the fittest I ever was in my life.

I remember one incident of class warfare on the hockey field in particular. We played at Melbourne Grammar School, which was regarded as a really toffee-nosed place.

It was a wet day and the field was very muddy. Our team of the sons of grocers, butchers and chemists was very rough with the upper-class Melbourne Grammar lads, and our parents on the sidelines were even worse, swearing like troopers, and abusing the referee.

After the match, the headmaster of Melbourne Grammar wrote to our headmaster complaining of the antics of our players and spectators, and a stern rebuke was made to us all at school assembly the following week. But we considered we had merely struck a blow in the ongoing war between the middle class and the upper class.

Lunchtimes at MGS were a war in themselves. We played a ferocious form of soccer with a tennis ball, with dozens of players destroying their school shoes on the stony pitch. We also played a vicious form of hide-and-seek known as Brandy, in which boys would run and hide in various places, and one boy would look for them and when found, would hurl a tennis ball as hard as possible at them, so they would then become the hunter in turn.

I also played tennis in my teens. I played for the school team for a while, but more notably at the Ranelagh Tennis Club near our house in Mount Eliza on the weekends. I used to play with Dave Holmes, as well as with more senior players who were friends of my parents, such as Stephen Murray-Smith and Robert Newton, part of the literary circle our family mixed with in those days.

There were both grass courts and red gravel (*en tout cas*). I had a demon first serve, but unfortunately it went out more than in a lot of the time. My second serve was a lollipop, which good players could attack. So I was only a reasonable player in the end, but we all had a lot of fun in the process.

While I'm on the subject of my modest sporting career, I became a fair table tennis

player, competing with Dave at his parents' house a lot of the time. We played very fast, but were not so good at the spin game. Nevertheless, I can still hold my own on the rare occasions I play in later life.

We also used to play ping pong at home among the family, with me and my brother and sisters competing quite vigorously in our teens. I think I was able to beat them usually, but not by much.

I remember my brother Bob got very frustrated when I would often just pip him, after the score went to 20-all, and we had to play advantage. He got so upset at my sibling competitiveness, he later shot an arrow not far from me – which broke a window of the downstairs basement, and caused a scene with the parents.

I did play a few games of Australian Rules Football in my teens, for the Mt Eliza Fire Brigade team, against other teams on the Mornington Peninsula.

And finally, I briefly took up hockey again at uni in the mid 1960s, when I played three games as goalie for University Blacks in the A-Reserve Grade competition. We had an exactly even record during that time, with one win, one loss and one draw.

Home front

Meals at home in Mt Eliza were also fun at times. I was regarded as a bit of a joker, and used to enjoy making my sisters and brother laugh until the porridge came out of their noses at breakfast.

Both my father Ian and myself were keen fans of the Goons (Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe). Their brand of manic British humour really appealed to me then, and still does.

I have always relished all those madcap English shows, from the Goons, to Monty Python, to the Goodies, to Black Adder and the Young Ones.

During my teenage years, at 6.30pm every Sunday night, all other noise had to cease in our house so we could listen to the Goon Show on the ABC, relayed from the BBC.

For a period of my life, I could virtually quote verbatim several whole Goon Shows, particularly the ones my parents bought on record for me.

“Hello folks at home, hello folks at home.”

And, from the English prison Dartmoor, at sea, “How do you repel boarders? Stop changing the bed linen.”

And, “There he was, all alone in the Indian Ocean, unable to speak a word of the language. Ten miles he swam. The last three were agony. They were over land.”

My Mum was a good cook. I still remember her old favorites: roast lamb or beef

with vegetables on Sundays, followed by Shepherd's Pie the next day, made by mincing the leftover meat.

Cauliflower cheese was another, as well as kedgeree (tuna and rice). And delicious spaghetti bolognese.

She was so good to us, including helping us with our homework. I am sure Cec assisted me a lot in getting good marks for English and social studies especially.

Ian would help with science and maths.

Cecily had a good friend Nessie, who was a librarian, and they had a strong mutual interest in books and reading. Cec later wrote some good poetry, which was published jointly with poems by my two sisters, Fiona and Fran.

I dabbled a little in writing and poetry in my youth. Early on at Mount Eliza, me and my cousin Michael published a couple of issues of a hand-written newspaper, *The Elandra Star*, which was fairly primitive, but did show an early interest in journalism.

I remember Michael's cartoon, a blank page, with the caption, "A ghost chasing a sheet in a snowstorm."

Later, I did write a few poems for the Mentone Grammar school magazine, one of which, entitled "Bushfire," was submitted by my Grandma Clare to the Melbourne *Age Literary Supplement*. Imagine my surprise and delight when it was actually published, and I received a cheque for 10 pounds in the mail!

I also sent it to my Godmother, Judith Wright, Cec's cousin, who kindly replied that it showed some promise. But that was pretty much the extent of my career in poetry and fiction writing. I did, however, become involved in political journalism at a much later date.

Among the things I did enjoy at school were English literature, history and social studies especially, as well as science in the early days. My father's profession as a meteorological physicist inclined me in the scientific direction career-wise, whereas my mother's social worker background encouraged me toward the humanities.

It is amazing to look back and think about the high points of one's knowledge in particular fields, which are often lost later in the mists of time.

For example, in year 8, we studied astronomy at school, and I became an expert on the statistics of the planets and stars for a short time. I could recite verbatim all the facts about the solar system, including the distances between the various planets, the composition of the atmospheres of Neptune and Jupiter and the names of all the moons, but now I can hardly remember any of this information, sadly.

That is one problem with the focus of schooling on preparation for exams alone. But I suppose it may help train us to absorb information and analyse it, for use in our future lives. ■

2. Broadening Horizons

An important part of the early political influence on me was the experience around the left-literary crowd associated with the journals *Overland* and *Meanjin*, focused on their editors, Stephen Murray-Smith and Clem Christensen, respectively. Ian and Cecily were friends of Stephen and Nita Murray-Smith, and we kids were friends with their children, David, Cleve and Joanna.

Apart from playing tennis with them, and socialising fairly regularly, there were many literary-political events, culminating in the annual *Meanjin-Overland* Cricket Match, usually held somewhere on the Mornington Peninsula.

It was a big occasion, and attracted large numbers of people for the game, and the beer, and the discussions which accompanied the event. The match was keenly fought out over an emu egg cup.

Many famous writers, poets and other literary figures took part, umpired or watched these matches. The Yarra Yarra Traditional Jazz Band sometimes played, and the kids had a great time.

The general atmosphere of left and critical intellectual interchange had a big effect on me, with many ex-members of the Communist Party, Labor and progressive intelligentsia in attendance, and arguing among themselves with great gusto.

Another feature of my life in Mount Eliza was Ian's and my membership of the Mount Eliza Volunteer Fire Brigade. Ian was the scientific officer, which meant he operated a heat-seeking probe to help find the seat of any bushfires in the area.

When the fire siren went off, we would both jump into Ian's car and race up to the fire station to join the other volunteers on the fire truck. Then we would head out to attend a bushfire, or a series of fires set by some demented firebug.

I remember once when the truck was called to the top of a cliff overlooking the bay, and sent a jet of water down to douse a BBQ set by some careless people on a day of total fire ban. More tragically, one young boy was killed when the truck overturned on the side of a hill, heading toward yet another fire on the mountain.

All in all, it was reputed that most young people joined the brigade just because it

was the only place in town with a full-sized billiard table!

As I went further on in secondary school, I began to lose a bit of interest in the competitive nature of exams, swotting etc. Because of the influence of my father, I sought to continue to study science and maths, while concentrating on my first love, which was English and humanities.

Partly as a result of the leftist atmosphere in Mt Eliza, I did a major school project on Siberia, relying on material from Stephen Murray-Smith. I remember being quite proud of my efforts and got a good mark for the material.

This Two Cultures duality (C.P. Snow) came to a head in Matriculation (Secondary Year 6). Partly due to the encouragement of our science teacher, Mr Sibley, I became involved in the Victorian Science Teachers' Prize, undertaking a project to create and study sound waves, entitled Sound Synthesis.

This project represented the highest level of knowledge and technique I ever achieved in the scientific field. I amazed myself by soldering a board to construct a Cathode Ray Oscilloscope (CRO), and used an old record turntable and cut-out cardboard shape to both analyse the graph for certain sounds, and then attempt to re-create them.

It was a weird experiment, but modestly successful. I remember the excitement of presenting my project to the public at University of Melbourne, and then winning £25 as recognition of my efforts. My friend Dave Holmes also did a project in the same competition, and also won a prize, if I remember rightly.

The downside of this effort was that the time and energy put into it did affect my studies leading up to the HSC exams at the end of 1963, and I didn't quite get the very high marks I and my teachers had expected of me.

This also meant that I didn't win a Commonwealth Scholarship, which would cover tuition and some living expenses for uni the next year. There was some disappointment all round: from myself, parents and teachers — especially Headmaster Jones.

I heard a rumour that after that experience, final year students at MGS were discouraged from entering the Science Teachers' Competition for fear that it would negatively affect their final marks.

That summer, Dave and I took a holiday job with Peter Creed, a friend of our families, who owned a farming property near Jerilderie in southern NSW, just up from the Murray River. We again did something we never had done before or since: build a fence on a sheep station.

This meant learning to drive in steel pickets with a sleeve sledgehammer, operate a tractor and posthole digger, dig and sink big wooden posts and strain wire with a

wire-strainer, as well as using a tractor to tighten the wire. This was an amazing physical and technical achievement for both of us, probably never equalled since.

It was a stinking hot summer, and at lunchtime, after munching our sandwiches, we would lie in a dam with just our noses above the water line, to keep cool. Afterwards, I often wondered how long our fence lasted, before sagging or falling down completely!

1964: Trip to the USA

1964 was a big year in my life. My father Ian was posted to the US to work in Arizona for a year with a meteorological department there.

In retrospect, I'm not sure Cecily was too keen on the family moving so far away at that time, but us kids were very excited about the prospect.

It was our first overseas trip, and we were so happy when the Dutch ship *Oranje* (Orange) taking us over to America set off from Princes Pier in Melbourne just before New Year, 1964. I do remember the rough trip across the Tasman Sea, when everyone was out throwing up their New Year dinner and drinks over the railing that night.

We stopped over in Wellington, my first visit to New Zealand, across The Ditch. I remember it was a pleasant place, which certainly lived up to its name, the Windy City.

From there, the *Oranje* (nicknamed Puddleduck, for its habit of wallowing and rolling excessively in high seas), made its way to Tahiti, French Polynesia. Papeete, the capital was a rundown colonial town, but Tahiti itself was beautiful.

I do remember being surprised by the black, volcanic beaches — something quite different to the pure white, sandy beaches we were used to in Australia.

From there, the ship wended its way across the Pacific Ocean to Acapulco, Mexico, where we disembarked for our great American adventure.

Acapulco was my first experience of Latin America. An exotic place it seemed at that time to an 18-year-old Australian youth.

I remember we saw the famous sight of the Mexican boys diving off the tall Acapulco cliffs to retrieve coins thrown in by Western tourists like ourselves. It was just an initial introduction to the hardships of the Third World, and the unequal relations between First World citizens and the peoples of the colonial countries.

From the coastal city of Acapulco, we travelled by bus to Mexico City, a vast metropolis suffering massive air pollution from petrol fumes, trapped in a mountain valley. There, we were able to view the fine murals of Diego Rivera and other well-known Mexican artists.

From Mexico City, we took a Greyhound Bus through mountains, plains and

deserts to the US border, where we crossed the Rio Grande into El Paso, which I recall having the longest suburban strip development along its main road I had ever seen.

The USA was amazing. Everything had to be the biggest and shiniest in the world.

In El Paso, we visited a Mexican-style restaurant and were confronted with a so-called Military Meal — the largest dinner I think I had ever seen, presumably because it was meant to feed an entire platoon!

Next stop was San Antonio, home of the Alamo, where Davy Crockett supposedly led the last stand of US heroes against the Mexican army, during the 19th century. We visited the Alamo site, but it wasn't until years later that I fully understood that the US had stolen Texas from Mexico, and that General Santa Ana's military were merely trying to defend their national territory against the northern invader.

From there, we set off for Phoenix, Arizona, our final destination, and home for the next six months or more. We moved into a pleasant, white-walled house in the suburbs, with air-conditioning, which we had never experienced before.

I attended Arizona State University (ASU) for one semester, my first experience of tertiary education. ASU had some stunning buildings, including its iconic baseball stadium, designed by the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

I studied in the Humanities Faculty, taking 101 courses in history, philosophy, literature and science. The studies were very stimulating, as was meeting students from all over the USA and overseas.

Joining the International Students' Association, I met other students from Africa, Europe and the Americas, which helped to broaden my cultural understanding considerably. I enjoyed my time at ASU, and learnt a lot about US and world politics in the process.

We had the privilege during our time in Phoenix of attending a mass rally for Martin Luther King, and hearing first hand his brilliant oratory and seeing his broad appeal. I began to appreciate the historic significance of the US Black civil rights movement for that period.

During this time, I composed some letters about US politics and the Black struggle which I sent to the MGS headmaster, Mr Jones. I only found out when I returned toward the end of 1964, that he had read them out to the whole school at assembly!

I made several good friends at ASU, including Mac MacDermott, who came from Chicago, Illinois. In the vacation, I made a fantastic trip with him in his Volkswagen Beetle all across the USA on the famous highway Route 66 to his home town.

We visited so many of the Mid West states, such as Kansas and Missouri, and then on to the infamous Chicago. Mac was a real character, and I am sorry I later lost contact with him after a few letters.

After touring Chicago, I took a bus to Syracuse, NY, where I stayed with another friend from ASU. I remember waterski-ing on Lake Syracuse, and enjoying the hospitality of the family there.

I regret that I had run short of money, and never went on to visit New York City itself. Instead, I took another Greyhound Bus through the Southern States to Texas, and back to Arizona.

On the way, we stopped at the cemetery in Virginia where John F Kennedy was buried and paid respects at his gravesite.

From there it is a bit of a blur till I got back to Phoenix and home.

On another occasion during our US stay, the family took a trip by car to the Grand Canyon, a magnificent wonder of nature. I remember the road continued forever through the desert with its huge cacti, until suddenly we were on the edge of the canyon. It was a tremendous thrill for an 18-year-old.

The rest of the family also enjoyed their time in Phoenix. My sisters and brother attended various schools and made friends, and immersed themselves in the life of 1960s USA, before the abrupt coming of age of the Vietnam War period.

The beginning of the new era of political confrontation was epitomised by the 1964 presidential elections. Lyndon Johnson was opposed by an extreme right-wing Republican, Barry Goldwater, who hailed from Arizona.

I distinctly recall the bumper stickers put out by the Democrats at the time: Back to the Store in '64 (referring to the fact that the Goldwater family owned a huge supermarket in Arizona at the time); and Au (Gold) + H₂O (Water) = H₂S (Hydrogen Sulphide, or Rotten Egg Gas).

Then I saw an early showing of the brilliant film *Dr Strangelove* at a cinema in Phoenix, at the height of the election campaign. Goldwater had recently stated that it might be necessary to use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union if the Cold War escalated.

We were all terrified. When *Dr Strangelove* ended, everyone in the audience just sat in their seats for five minutes, paralysed with trepidation about the threat of a nuclear war. Goldwater was trounced in the 1964 US presidential elections by “peace candidate” Johnson — who then proceeded to ramp up the war against the Vietnamese people in the most ruthless way.

That was a major education for me in the hypocrisies of US and world politics.

When we eventually returned home to Australia in August that year, I was a wiser and more educated person in the ways of the world.

I then returned to Mentone Grammar School to complete the final term of a second HSC year. I was more focused, and concentrated on my studies. As a result, I

achieved better marks in the HSC, and managed to win a Commonwealth Scholarship this time.

That year, 1964, began the process of turning an 18-year-old boy into a more serious and worldly wise adult, with a better understanding of the nature of the social system which dominated our country and the international scene.

At the end of 1964, I took another holiday job at the Spencer Street Railway Yards, loading rail trucks for country Victoria. I took this job for a month for a couple of years during my student days, for the princely wage of \$40 a week, if I remember rightly.

It was a good introduction to wage labour, and gave me some insight into the conditions of workers in Australia at that time.

One big task we did every day over summer was to load up a large rail wagon full of beer for the Mildura Workingmen's Club — which was reputed to have the longest bar in the world. One trick we pulled was handed down from the truckies: you broke one tallie bottle of Victoria Bitter or Fosters Lager, and poured beer over the rest of the carton. Then you carefully opened the other bottles, drank their contents, broke the bottles and put the cap back on the tops.

That certainly helped to slake our thirst on a blistering hot work-day!

University of Melbourne

In my first term at University of Melbourne, in February 1965, I moved into Queens College, Parkville, one of the classic, historic residential colleges, opposite Carlton Cemetery. My parents made financial sacrifices for me, as it was too far to travel from home to the uni every day, and they considered college the best option to start off with.

Queens College was owned by the Methodist (later Uniting) Church, whose main claim to fame was a total ban on alcohol. This failed utterly to prevent (and maybe even encouraged) drinking among the student residents. In fact, the biggest piss-pots in the whole place were the Logs (theological students), who never failed to have a flagon of cheap red or white wine under their beds.

So much for the efficacy of prohibition!

College life was a bit like boarding school in some ways, with the difference that there was much less control over the students, and many of them were pretty wild. A lot of the residents were country students, who started out quite conservative-minded, but in many cases soon became absorbed into the increasingly radical spirit of the 1960s.

My best friend in college was Ron Anderson, a jazz aficionado, and sax player, and we spent some time enjoying the modern jazz together. During this time, I temporarily lost some contact personally with my old mate Dave Holmes, who had commenced a science degree a year earlier, while I started an arts course.

My first year subjects were a little unusual: English literature, political science, Indonesian language and social studies; and physics 1C. The physics was a special one-year course for arts students, and did not continue into second year.

I suppose I took it out of deference to my father, and my continued interest in natural science — although I had definitely decided on a humanities direction overall by then. By second year, I was set on political science as my major — reflecting my abiding passion for politics, which was to dominate the rest of my life.

The world of university was very different to school. The freedom of choice was much greater. It was much less regimented, but also less supportive of the individual.

You could basically apply yourself to studies, or not, as you chose, at least in the initial instance. I probably fell in the middle in the early period at uni.

I enjoyed the lectures and tutorials, although I found the overall conservative framework of the Department of Political Science increasingly hard to take. My first professor, Prof McMahon Ball, was very good and supportive of us.

But two of my lecturers in Australian politics later became federal Liberal MPs. Nevertheless, included among the staff were Lloyd Churchward, a long-time Communist, who lectured in Soviet politics, resolutely against the Cold War stream. And Arthur Huck (actually my uncle), taught Chinese politics and international relations within a progressive framework.

I enjoyed reading for and writing the essays in politics, as well as in the Indonesian studies course. And the lectures and tutorials in English were a hoot. The lecturers were mostly prominent poets and writers themselves, and were renowned eccentrics.

Our lecturer in first-year English, the poet Vincent Buckley, used to be so drunk, he had to hold himself up around the walls to get to the lecture stand. Then he would deliver a brilliant address on Keats, Byron or Yeats, and nearly collapse on his way out.

The English department was a traditionalist one of the F.R. Leavis school, who believed that there was one great canon of literature (in English or other languages), which should alone be studied. Modern literature consisted of T.S. Elliot, Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, and that was about it.

This was the source of much controversy in literary circles at the time, in Britain as well as Australia. But it probably seems very old hat today.

Nevertheless, I loved reading and analyzing the great literature of Shakespeare, and the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, Browning and so on. Macbeth is my favorite

Shakespeare play, and I can still quote key passages from it on call.

I really threw myself into the studies in Indonesian history and politics, which occurred at a tumultuous time in that country's development. While we were studying the complex history of Indonesia's many cultures, with the waves of Hindu, Muslim and then Dutch colonial invasion, the dark threat of a right-wing coup and massacre loomed.

Bahasa Indonesia was ok, but foreign languages are not my strongest point. Indonesia had the largest Communist Party outside the Soviet and Chinese socialist world. But this would not prevent it being destroyed almost overnight, and one of the most horrendous massacres in the latter 20th century occurring.

In late 1965, I wrote one of my best essays ever, in Indonesian Language and Social Studies, on the Suharto coup and its dreadful aftermath.

It was during this period that my understanding of social theory and practice began to become more developed and radicalised. The combination of the Suharto coup and pogrom in Indonesia from October 1965, and the escalation of the US and Australian intervention in Vietnam propelled my move further to the left.

The odd one out of my first year subjects was Physics. It was a very interesting intellectual exercise for me to take a lone science subject, designed for arts students, and finishing after one year. Whatever its limitations, a little knowledge of science is better than nothing — and not so dangerous as none (as the current debate on climate change clearly shows).

For the rest of my life I have had an appreciation of, and respect for, science and its theoretical and practical discipline — in contrast to the haphazard nature of the academic social sciences. It taught me to be critical of the pseudo-scientific character of much of what passes for “political and social science” in particular.

Nevertheless, some of the science lecturers were quite hopeless as teachers. I remember one lecturer who droned on until half of us fell asleep.

One day, a student rolled a Jaffa down the steps of the lecture theatre, as the teacher was writing on the board. The elderly lecturer then stunned us all by racing up the steps, having counted how many times the lolly had dropped down as it rolled, and confronting the miscreant student who had tried to disrupt his class.

During the first couple of years of my Political Science degree, we used to study theorists such as Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and Daniel Bell, who essentially in various ways attempted to posit alternative frameworks to Marxism. I increasingly realised that their theories were merely ideological justifications, in various guises, for the capitalist status quo.

I have always valued my studies in Political Science and academic social theory, as

it has proven to me that the theory of capitalism is baseless, both scientifically and ethically. Know thy enemy, as the saying goes.

One of my growing interests in the early years of uni was the cinema. I joined the Melbourne University Film Society (MUFS), and attended showings at the cinema in the Union Building quite often. I began to appreciate the contemporary experimental movies of the French Nouvelle Vague (New Wave), from directors such as Godard, Renoir, Chabrol and others, as well as the Italian social realist school.

I started attending the Melbourne Film Festival, which went over a week or two, at St Kilda, right near Luna Park. I recollect on one occasion a group of us students actually rented a room for a week nearby so that we could attend the festival full-time — that is, four or five films a day!

You would come out exhausted and square-eyed by the end of the time. But it was exhilarating to get such an insight into a broader cultural world way outside our experience up to that time.

There used to be a red stream or a blue stream, so you had to decide which one you wanted to see, and that season ticket would entitle you to view dozens of movies. It was a cinematic feast, and one of the highlights of the year for me.

I started to develop my social life in those early years of uni, 1965-66. I began to go to more parties, where a lot of red and white wine was consumed — including by me. The most common vehicle was the two-litre flagon, full of cheap wine, which had a lip at the top so you could hold onto it, even if lying drunk in the hallway or some Carlton share-house late at night.

I met more young women students around the place, although I still didn't have a real "girlfriend." My social set included the group around Judy Swinbank, and her friends, including architectural students, other arts undergraduates etc.

I recall joining in camping trips with them, including to the Valhalla Gorge, in Gippsland, which was formerly an old gold-mining area, then a popular weekend place to visit and stay overnight.

By that time, I had gained my driver's licence from the Frankston police station. And I started borrowing my Mum's white Morris Mini-Minor, to travel between uni and Mount Eliza on weekends.

In those days, before the advent of the police blue van breathalyser, we used to do some dreadful and dangerous things on the road. I remember driving absolutely drunk one Saturday night, so blotto that I had to tell myself just to watch the white line in the middle of Nepean Highway and keep it on the right side of the car.

Once, near Seaford, I fell asleep and spun the car around in a circle, nearly rolling it on its side. I got such a shock, I was fully awake for the rest of the trip to my parents'

place. But I think we still didn't learn the lesson not to drink and drive, despite the growing road toll of young people in those days.

Papua New Guinea adventure

During the uni holidays, December to February 1965-66, I undertook another overseas adventure, without family this time. I joined the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) work brigade to Papua New Guinea for a month.

This was the period of the Peace Corps initiated by President John F Kennedy as a method of winning hearts and minds in the Third World, as part of the Cold War against the Soviet Union and China.

The NUAUS brigade to PNG was somewhat different, as a project of Australian students, separate from the government, to attempt to assist disadvantaged villagers in this country's main colony (at that time).

It was a real eye-opener for me, to see the ordinary people of PNG, but also to learn teamwork with fellow students, in a positive, if a bit liberal-minded, endeavour.

Our first task was to build a health clinic in an outlying village, some miles from the capital, Port Moresby. We managed to do it, with the help of some architecture and building students, but without much finesse.

Most of us were arts students, with little practical experience or knowledge in construction. I could see the villagers watching us with a degree of wonderment and amusement, thinking that maybe it would have been better if NUAUS had merely donated the money for tools and materials to them, so they could complete the task themselves.

Nevertheless, they were very friendly and grateful, and looked after us in the village huts with great hospitality. I do remember having to leap under our mosquito nets at dusk as a great droning noise was heard when a swarm of mozzies approached from the nearby swamp every night.

We then helped build a women's community house at a larger village, just on the outskirts of Port Moresby. This was a bigger job, but by then we were a bit more experienced, and completed it reasonably efficiently.

Finally, we flew up to Mount Hagen, in the central mountains, in an ancient DC3 aircraft, whose windows rattled as it flew on. It seemed somewhat dicey, but these planes had done faithful service in PNG for many years.

It was reported that some small planes, without proper radar, would occasionally find themselves surrounded by dense cloud as they flew into the ranges, and could

only fly around until they hit a mountain.

In those days, people used to hitch-hike by standing at the end of the runway, and asking the pilot for a ride as he prepared to take off. Many landing strips in PNG were pieces of cleared ground running up the hill, so that the plane could stop easily, as well as take off more quickly downhill over the edge of a cliff!

The PNG mountains were astonishing for a young Australian used only to glorified hills as our highest peaks. The mountains there were green giants — it was as though the earth had rumpled up like a huge carpet, contrasting to the brown, dry plains and deserts of home.

I then took one of the most exciting and terrifying trips in my life in the back of a truck, haring down the mountains from Mount Hagen to Lae, on the northern coast. It was a miracle that we made it, given the road was just gravel, and snaked down the side of the range, overhanging a steep drop to the valley below.

We were so glad to get to Lae in one piece. There I visited the war cemetery containing so many Australian diggers from World War II. I also somehow managed to fit in a game of golf at the Lae Golf Club!

Back in Port Moresby, we met many of the local PNG students, and were (perhaps naively) shocked to find the degree of open racism that they routinely experienced from the Australian expatriate colonials. This was a further step in my education about the ways of the world, and the nature of imperialist exploitation — in particular, from my own home country.

Early political involvement

I began to get involved in politics around this time. In the first place, I joined the Democratic Socialist Club at Melbourne Uni, a kind of a Fabian Society-oriented moderate left organisation, distinct from the more radical left Labour Club.

I also joined the Carlton Central Branch of the ALP, which had a number of students, as well as workers and others involved. The branch used to meet monthly in a pub in Lygon Street.

As the US escalated the Vietnam War during 1965, and the Menzies government dragged Australia into it, we began the long and hard process of organising opposition to the war. Initially, this involved a series of meetings, teach-ins and small protest demonstrations, in a ferocious contest with the Democratic Labor Party Club and other right-wing organisations on campus.

I remember debates we had with people like Gerard Henderson, then secretary of

the DLP Club, and Frank Knopfelmacher, a right-wing, anti-Communist Czech refugee who lectured in psychology at MU. Issues like the CIA White Paper on the alleged “threat from the North” in Vietnam, the Gulf of Tonkin “incident” in 1965, and various other Cold War confrontations dominated these debates.

We also held teach-ins on the growing war, emphasising the aggressive actions of US, Australian and other Western countries in invading a peaceful country, which had been fighting for its independence for decades. As this ideological struggle intensified, I began to see the international class struggle which lay behind this war.

I began to radicalise further under the impact of these titanic events. I read the book *Towards Socialism*, edited by Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn, published by the British Marxist journal *New Left Review*, and a bright light came on in my head.

Together with articles from the *NLR* and the annual publication *Socialist Register*, the intellectual appeal of Marxism became increasingly apparent to me. I have never turned back from this fundamental understanding since then.

The practical consequences of imperialism were dramatically driven home to me personally when Prime Minister Robert Menzies introduced conscription for overseas service in 1965. Then in 1966, my marble came out of the barrel, and I was due to be drafted into the Australian Army to be sent to Vietnam.

Along with all 20-year-old males, our birthdays were included in the “Lottery of Death”, and mine was drawn out publicly on TV that year. Like so many others, I was shocked and outraged.

And when I went to the Melbourne Uni cafeteria next day, somewhat the worse for wear, I found that many of my friends had been conscripted as well. In the early days of the draft, a high proportion of birthdays were chosen, in an attempt to rapidly expand the Australian military, which had become largely a professional corps after the ending of conscription in the 1950s.

All of us were determined not to be sent to fight the Vietnamese liberation movement. So we all managed to keep out by various means: mine was to stay at university for another six years, gaining deferment each year as a full-time student.

Others fled to England, feigned insanity, or even became draft resisters. I have always loved the Arlo Guthrie movie, *Alice's Restaurant*, as a hilarious, satirical depiction of the madness of the draft in the US.

The effect of the reintroduction of conscription in Australia was to accelerate the debate on the Vietnam War, and to begin the slow polarising division of the country, which eventually led to the development of a mass anti-war movement by the early 1970s.

A couple of personal anecdotes from the time: I met a young national serviceman

on the Spirit of Progress train between Melbourne and Sydney on one occasion, who was wearing a neck chain with a peace symbol on it. He told me that the story inside the army went, “There are only two types of soldiers, the idiots and the fools.”

One were the “nashos”, and the other were the “lifers” (volunteers), he added. I can’t remember which was which.

On another occasion, I got into an argument with an old bloke who supported the Vietnam War. He told me I was a coward for not volunteering to join the army and go to Vietnam.

I replied: “I wouldn’t mind going to Vietnam to fight. The only issue is, I’d go over to fight for the Viet Cong!”

We nearly had a punch-up after that.

At the end of 1966, Menzies called a federal election to seek a “mandate” for the Australian intervention in Vietnam. Arthur Calwell, the racist, former Chifley government immigration minister, who strongly supported the White Australia policy, was leader of the ALP at the time.

Nevertheless, Calwell, to his credit, took a firm position against the war and conscription into the election. It was, ironically, one of the most principled stands taken by a Labor Party leader in history.

I was quite heavily involved in the campaign, through my ALP branch in Carlton. I remember handing out leaflets before the election, and How-to-Vote Cards on polling day.

Labor suffered a massive defeat, as most people didn’t yet understand the meaning of the war, and the labour movement was still divided by the split with the DLP. It was a turning point in modern Australian politics.

I recall we took some minor revenge on election night over the Liberal and Country Party supporters in Queens College by loudly and drunkenly singing *The Red Flag* in the courtyard, to keep them awake. It was a small consolation, but did help to fire us up for the long political struggle ahead.

1967: Egyptian experience

1967 was a huge year in my life. Ian received a posting to the Egyptian department of agriculture, under the auspices of the United Nations, to work with and train local technicians in meteorology, and particularly the study of evaporation.

So it was off to the hot countries again for the McIlroy family. This time I’m sure Cecily was not happy with the move. In retrospect, it may also have had to do with

rumours of Ian's involvement with another woman, an Englishwoman, who had a project to plant trees in Algeria and other North African countries, to attempt to take back part of the Sahara Desert.

I was too oblivious or naïve to notice such things at that stage, unfortunately.

Nevertheless, it was a great adventure for the rest of the family. A problem for me was that I was conscripted, and could normally only gain deferment as a full-time student.

Somehow, Ian managed to pull strings, especially with the then Professor of Political Science at Melbourne Uni, MacMahon Ball, to enable me to gain a special deferment to travel overseas to study in Cairo. In hindsight, it was a miracle that the government allowed me to go, as many conscripts were escaping OS to evade the draft at that time.

So it was that we boarded the wonderful Italian liner *Marconi* at Port Melbourne and set off across the Great Australian Bight to Perth, before heading over the Indian Ocean. I remember Perth as a big country town at the time, very clean and spacious.

The Great Australian Bight was a very rough stretch of water. I remember everyone lining the railing after dinner and drinks on New Year's Eve, much the worse for wear.

During the voyage, I got to know two very sophisticated and worldly women, older than myself, Wendy and Caro. We met at the ship's bar, and I got a taste for Campari and soda from that experience.

Wendy was the wife of the famous artist Brett Whiteley, and they were both traveling to London to join the Australian expat cultural set there. I really enjoyed their conversation and company, and the ship's band, which constantly played *Quando*, *quando* and other Italian favorites.

After Perth, we next stopped in Colombo, and then on to Bombay. I don't have many clear memories of these places, except that they were very hot, crowded and noisy.

The next port of call was Aden, then a British colony, immersed in an independence war with the Yemeni National Liberation Front. We were warned not to walk up the top of certain streets in the city, for fear of kidnap or other violence.

At that stage, I had a general sympathy for the anti-colonial revolutions, but was not very aware of the details of the history of Arab national liberation struggles. That was to change during the big year of 1967.

We arrived and disembarked at Port Said, after traversing the Suez Canal. We then went on to the fabulous, historic city of Cairo, intent on staying for a year.

We moved into a flat in the middle-class suburb of Maadi, a haven for foreigners among the dusty and poor stretches of urban Cairo, south of the city along the Nile River.

It was exciting and exotic for us youngsters to be in one of the most famous and oldest cities in the world. I remember we had an enthusiastic Egyptian cook/cleaner, as all foreigners did in those days.

I enrolled in the American University of Cairo, situated in the centre of town, right near the famous Tahrir (Freedom) Square. Courses were mainly taught in English, fortunately for me.

I did manage to learn some spoken Arabic, but the written language was too hard to absorb in a short time. I can still count to 10 in Arabic (as I can in Bahasa Indonesian), but not much more, I must confess.

The best thing I learnt at that university was the history of the Middle East and Africa, which was fascinating. That course, although introductory, blew away any misconceptions about the “primitive” nature of Arabic and Black African societies.

We Westerners had our eyes opened to the advanced civilisations of the Middle East, as well as of Western and Eastern Africa — which were highly developed, at around the time Europe was mired in the Dark Ages.

I also got to know many Egyptian students, mainly middle class as they often spoke fluent English, as well as French, in addition to Arabic. Nevertheless, many of them were progressive minded, even left-wing, in the context of the 1960s international situation and the local predominance of Arab nationalism/socialism, led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.

There was a strong progressive political and cultural current in Egyptian society at the time, with a pronounced anti-Israeli, and anti-US imperialist, core. Discussions with these students helped to deepen my radicalism, and gave it more direction.

I remember celebrating my 21st birthday with the family, and thinking about the future. We attended quite a few parties with locals and foreigners, and despite the strength of Islam, imbibed a large amount of alcohol.

I remember (vaguely) one party at which they passed around a wineskin, which spilled all over you if you didn't drink up properly. I got so drunk, I couldn't stand up, and had to be carried home and dumped on my bed unconscious.

The family visited a number of the famous monuments around Cairo, including the Pyramids and the amazing Egyptian National Museum. The museum was incredible, because it was absolutely packed with treasures from the era of the Pharaohs, but utterly disordered, with mummies and sarcophaguses piled up on top of one another throughout the various musty rooms.

Traveling to university was an adventure in itself. The train from Maadi station to the city centre was always full to bursting, with young men hanging out the side doors and even on the roof. I wondered how many fell off, were collected by the electric

pylons or were actually electrocuted.

I loved the Egyptian food — falafels, tamaya sandwiches, hommus and strong black, sweet coffee. The old areas of Cairo were a delight, with shops selling all kinds of wares, the aroma of spices and so on.

I really enjoyed mixing with fellow students, and discussing politics and culture. I developed close friends, and had a big crush on a beautiful young Swedish-Egyptian woman called Nadia.

Fiona, Bob and Fran all had their own lives and experiences in Cairo, but I was so absorbed in my new circle, I was in a world of my own. No doubt, they can tell their own stories about that fascinating time.

As the year 1967 went on, tensions between the Arab world, and Egypt in particular, and Israel, began to grow. A war of words escalated, with President Nasser warning of an approaching confrontation.

The dark clouds of war loomed over Cairo. The family decided to send Cecily, Fiona, Bob and Fran to England just to be on the safe side.

The “menfolk”, including Ian, myself and many of the other foreign UN officials and technicians, stayed on to see what would happen. We were apprehensive, but not totally alarmed, by the situation at that stage.

However, in practice, Egypt was not prepared for war with the Zionist state, and was caught completely by surprise when the Israelis staged a lightning air strike in early June. US-supplied Israeli jets attacked without warning at dawn, and virtually wiped out the Egyptian airforce on the ground — including destroying a whole line of Egyptian MiG jets lined up in a row at a military base only a few kilometres from our house in Maadi.

Then, Israeli tanks and troops over-ran Egyptian forces in the Sinai Desert, and launched a blitzkrieg across the desert to seize the Suez Canal. It was clear that, despite his militant rhetoric, Nasser was totally unprepared for the ruthless aggression of the Israelis.

Everyone had been ordered to cover up their windows to create a total black-out. And Ian and I could only watch with amazement and growing concern from the darkened roof of our apartment block as huge flashes and explosions lit up the night sky, all around the city.

At that early stage, it seemed that the Israelis were carpet bombing the whole of Cairo, although the BBC radio news reported that they were only attacking military and airforce bases.

Although the confrontation was later dubbed the Six Day War, no one knew how long it would last at the time. An emergency evacuation of remaining women and

children was ordered by the British and Australian embassies. I, along with other young men, was included to assist women with children etc.

Ian and other key UN technical staff decided to remain and stick it out.

I vividly recall all the women, youth and children gathered at midnight at Cairo central station, and were crammed onto a darkened train for the trip to the famous Mediterranean seaport city of Alexandria. Once there, we trooped onto the upper deck of a wheat-carrying cargo ship for an urgent voyage to Cyprus.

Thus, I was technically a refugee for a short while — although the conditions facing us Westerners were never comparable with those suffered by asylum seekers fleeing Middle East war zones in more recent times.

Nevertheless, we did get a fright that evening when the ship was buzzed by a submarine. We were never sure if it was Israeli or Egyptian, but it did put a temporary scare through the passengers on our vessel.

Next day we arrived, very relieved, at the Cyprus port of Famagusta. I helped an English mother, by carrying her baby off the ship in a carry-cot.

Later on, walking through the town, I was called over by a man, “Mister, mister, come and see this.” He gave me a copy of the local newspaper with the story of the refugee arrivals and a photo of myself with the baby, coming down the gangplank of the ship.

I hope I still have that paper somewhere in my files. I’ll get round to looking for it and many other relics of my life sometime soon in the many boxes of files stored in various places.

Sojourn in Britain

From Cyprus, we were flown in an airforce plane to Britain, where I rejoined Cec, Fiona, Bob and Fran. They were living in a flat in North Finchley (an area later infamous for being the home of Margaret Thatcher).

So, from June 1967 till November that year, I lived with my family in London, with some trips around the UK in between. Two that were particularly memorable were the visit to Scotland for the Edinburgh Festival, and my sojourn with brother Bob through southern England to Devon and Cornwall.

In London, I had met up with friends from Melbourne Uni who were also making the young Aussie pilgrimage to the Old Country, as so many did in those days. We decided to hire a car and travel up to Edinburgh for the famous festival.

The trip up to Scotland was wonderful, with the green English countryside so

different to the wide, brown land at home. I remember attending a number of plays and musical events in Edinburgh, as well as the famous Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

We also toured around Scotland, visiting the Isle of Skye and Loch Ness. No sign of the Loch Ness Monster though.

I distinctly remember drinking McEwans Ale, served ice cold, just like Australian beer, the only beer in Britain which was at all like the beer sold back home. The only comparison in England was Pale Ale; otherwise it was Charrington's Red Ale, served warm, and strange to an Oz palate.

Scotland was fantastic, craggy and cold, with the highlands so desolate, and so unlike Australia. It was a really new experience for a 21-year-old Australian like myself and my companions.

The other main trip I took was with brother Bob to the south of England, first by train to Salisbury Cathedral, then down to the seaside at Dover, and then by bus and hitchhiking to Cornwall. My most enduring memory is of spending an evening in a genuine Old English Pub in Devon, drinking Scrumpy (apple cider straight out of the barrel, and as strong as rocket fuel).

We then staggered out of the pub, wandered along a laneway, and finally collapsed in a field to sleep it off overnight. We both had a terrible hangover the following day, I do recollect.

Our time in London was very pleasant, visiting art galleries, museums and other tourist attractions. One thing I well remember was seeing the movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, starring Warren Beattie and Fay Dunaway, which was quite a revelation in its day.

Visiting Carnaby Street and Soho was also a cultural experience of the 1960s, and the sounds of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were everywhere. England was the centre of the cultural universe in those heady days.

Finally, it was time to head home. I decided to attempt the "hippy trail," taking the overland route across Europe, and the Middle East to India, and then on to Australia by air.

Trip across the world

I answered an advert in the London *Times* to take that adventurous trip, which was not so uncommon in those days, but would be almost impossible today. A young Englishman named Edwin and his wife were travelling in a Commer van (just like they used to deliver the laundry) across to Calcutta, and were seeking paying fellow travellers to assist with the costs.

The van had windows all around, with three double bus seats in the back, to allow for six passengers in addition to the English couple, making eight occupants in all. I paid Edwin a total of merely £100 for the whole trip, including some basic food which we took with us, to be supplemented locally on the way.

So I took leave of my family, including Ian who had arrived from Cairo by that time, and headed off from London to Dover for the ferry voyage to Antwerp, Belgium, on the first stage of our incredible adventure.

The paying passengers consisted of myself, two Australian sisters from Queensland, two New Zealanders, and a young English woman called Diana Streetporter. Altogether, we soon formed four doubles for accommodation purposes — Edwin and wife, the two Queensland girls, myself and a young NZ man, and Diana and the other young Kiwi woman, a nurse.

Belgium was a mecca for beer, having more local varieties than anywhere else on earth it seems. We enjoyed the historic scenery of Europe, but my detailed memory of that aspect is a bit blurred so long afterwards.

I do remember we arrived in Munich in time for Oktoberfest, and so enjoyed the huge steins of beer and carousing which that German festival is so famous for. I later heard a rumour that Australians were banned from the festival at one stage because of their outrageous behaviour.

We then crossed the border into Austria, and visited historic Vienna, one of the great cities of old Europe. Austria, with its towering mountains and picturesque valleys, was one of the most beautiful countries I have ever visited.

Next, we entered Yugoslavia, still a Communist country in those days. I don't remember many details of our visit, except for the excellent publicly-owned restaurants in Belgrade, and the historic city of Nis, towards the east of the country.

From Yugoslavia, we visited Bulgaria, and its capital city Sofia. Sofia possessed a stunning centre, with yellow-stone, paved streets and striking ancient buildings, churches and parks.

I clearly remember all the red flags and banners with portraits of Lenin, as our visit coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. I collected some souvenirs of that great occasion, which are probably gathering dust somewhere among my belongings.

Next port of call was Istanbul in Turkey, the historic meeting point of Europe and the Middle East. This was real multiculturalism, with the combined architecture of the great mosque, previously the Church of St Sophia, the bazaars and the evidence of European influences as well.

We then crossed the Bosphorus by vehicle ferry, and travelled on to the modern

capital of Turkey, Ankara. I remember overcoming my initial distaste for sour milk, as we went along, and learning the joys of lamb and beef kebabs.

We then ventured south to the Mediterranean seaside for a couple of nights. This represented an important point in my life: I became involved with Diana, and experienced my first full-on encounter with the opposite sex.

This led to a surreptitious affair over the next month or two, rather difficult in the situation we were in. But I fell head over heels for Diana, and this involvement continued until we reached Calcutta.

Meanwhile, we camped out each night off the road, with our four tents in a circle, with the van in the middle. Somehow, thieves managed to steal the spare wheel off the Commer one night in the mountains of Turkey.

This incident did spook us a little, but overall we did not feel threatened much in the whole trip over 10 weeks and three continents. After travelling through the mountains of Turkey, we went close to the border of the Soviet Union, before crossing over into Iran.

My main role in the division of labour on the trip was “water boy.” That is, I kept the drinking water supply up by filtering water through a wonderful porcelain filter device, which removed the bacteria and made it safe to drink. This was a marvellous system, proven by the fact that no one got sick from the water over the whole two and a half months of our trip!

Our first stop in Iran was Tabriz, followed by the capital Teheran. On the way, I was struck by the number of wrecked Mercedes Benz cars we saw off the side of the road, obviously the result of Iranian migrants to Germany rushing home too fast to see their families.

This border area was very flat and basically one big grassy plain. Later we came into more mountainous territory north of Teheran.

Teheran itself seemed like a typical Third World city: huge skyscrapers and Western-style inner areas, surrounded by mud huts and slums for the millions of poor people.

Islamic conservatism toward women was obvious. Our women companions, including Diana, were hassled by male passersby for wearing skirts that were considered too short, and we were pushed out of a mosque because women were apparently not allowed in that area.

Our arrival happened to coincide with the anniversary of the Shah's coronation. This event only emphasised the bizarre disparity between rich and poor in the kingdom of Iran at that time.

The regime spent millions of dollars on celebrating the coronation, while the

ordinary people lived in abject poverty. Each village we passed through was given a grant to build a royal archway, with colored lights, while the locals had no potable drinking water available.

It is obvious to me now that the social pressure for the outbreak of the mass-based Iranian Revolution of 1979 was starting to build up even 12 years earlier.

We then took a detour south to the holy city of Isfahan, and visited the great mosque there. I was very impressed by the grandeur of that building and its surroundings.

From there, we travelled north through the mountains to Meshed, and then across the border into Afghanistan. Afghanistan was surely the poorest country we had seen on our travels so far.

Our first stop was Herat, followed by a long trip southward to the now infamous Kandahar. The country's only highway was excellent, having been constructed as a by-product of the Cold War.

The stretch from Herat to Kandahar was built by the Soviets, while the section from Kandahar to the capital Kabul was constructed by the US. I imagined that this highway, virtually the only road in the country at that time, was like a Roman Road: It would still be there in a thousand years time, bisecting the deserts of barren Afghanistan.

Maybe, the wars of the last 30 years have broken it up a bit since then. What a tragedy for the long-suffering people of that country.

On our trip, we travelled through desert country, with towering mountains in the distance, then drove off the road into a somewhat sheltered area to camp for the night. It seemed like a voyage on the surface of the moon, with not a soul around.

One morning, we woke up to hear the grunting of camels coming closer. We arose to see a long camel train approaching.

They came up to us, carrying men covered in scarves, with ancient muzzle-loading rifles on their backs. We were a bit worried they might be bandits.

In any case, we were saved by the fact that our NZ nurse was able to bandage up one of the men who had a bullet wound. This made them most grateful, and they gave us some food and greeted us before wending their way onwards into the desert again.

Kandahar was a dry, desolate place, of mud buildings and extreme poverty. Street stall-holders were selling wares, including meat lying drying in the sun on blankets, covered in flies.

From Kandahar, we travelled up the US-made section of the highway to Kabul. In Kabul, Edwin bought a couple of historic muzzle-loading rifles from a merchant, for which he had to pay a bribe at the Pakistan border later on.

The road from Kabul to Pakistan was very rough and steep, before we finally

crossed over into the famous Khyber Pass on the way to Peshawar. In the Khyber Pass, we got a fright from an incident with the Pakistan Army.

We had stopped in the pass to take some photographs of the rugged mountain scenery, when a Pakistani military jeep rushed up and some soldiers waved their weapons at us, shouting, “You are Indian spies!”

“No, we are just tourists looking at the scenery,” we replied. Eventually, we succeeded in convincing them we were harmless, and we went on our way.

I should mention at this point that I had adopted one special hobby on this amazing trip: collecting hats.

From Turkey, to Afghanistan, to Pakistan and India, and even Indonesia on the flight home to Australia, I bought hats in the markets when I could. I eventually collected about 10 hats, which were later displayed in a feature article in the Melbourne *Herald* by a journalism student friend of mine, Belinda, after I arrived home in late 1967.

I still have that collection of hats, somewhat moth-eaten, in a plastic bag among my precious personal belongings.

From Peshawar, we went on to Lahore, before the eventful crossing over into India, for the last leg of our amazing, overland adventure.

One memory of Pakistan was the night we went out to dinner at a curry restaurant. On the menu, they had a special section entitled: Curry for Westerners.

We thought, OK, that shouldn't be too hot. In fact, our throats were burning and faces red with the chilli and spices. I could only wonder at how hot the local variety of the curries was!

Crossing the border into India was not as simple as it might sound in those days. Pakistan and India had just fought another of their major border wars in 1965, and the main frontier post was still closed two years later.

We had to detour and cross over at a small village some distance further south instead. I remember seeing burnt out tanks littering the sides of the road, as a grim relic of that bitter running conflict (an inheritance of British colonial misrule in the end).

After successfully navigating the border, we headed to Amritsar, centre of the Sikh religion and nation. As so many tourists had done before us, we stayed at the famous Golden Temple, which offers hospitality to visitors for free.

From there we went on to New Delhi, capital of India. New Delhi has a modern centre, but with many heritage buildings and parks from the Victorian British colonial era.

Surrounding the centre is a huge slum area where the majority of the poor people

of the city live. We managed to find a piece of spare land to set up our camp.

Next stop was Agra, where of course we visited the fabulous Taj Mahal Temple. We also saw the Red Fort, a centre of Indian civilisation over centuries.

Then we travelled along the Ganges River to Varanasi, site of the well-known Love Temples, which certainly lived up to their name. Carvings of scenes from the Kama Sutra have drawn visitors from all over the world.

One novel experience we had during the Indian trip was a visit to the cinema to watch a Bollywood movie. I remember the standard theme: hero rows up the river to find his beloved, marooned on an island, singing and dancing as he goes.

Our final stop in India, and for the whole 10-week trek across half the world, was Calcutta (today Kolkata) — a vast, sprawling metropolis. Entering the city in the early morning, I remember the thick smog blanketing the whole city.

Calcutta has a central area featuring large buildings from the Victorian era, with a huge swathe of slums radiating for miles and miles around it. I also remember the British-made Howrah Bridge.

During the day, multitudes of beggars besieged us wherever we walked. But during the evening, we were able to wander through the back streets freely, observing the rich and vital life of the Indian people.

I remember one day we were warned by our landlord to stay away from the centre as there was a Hartal (general strike) declared. We were told that public servants often took a week's supply of rice and other food with them to work, as they might be blockaded in for that long during such industrial struggles.

There was one radical newspaper called *Blitz* which reported on all the strikes and demonstrations occurring around the state of West Bengal at the time. There was a fierce guerrilla war being fought by the Maoist Naxalites in the countryside in those times against the CPI (Marxist)-dominated coalition government of the state.

One report explained that the railways, ever since the British period, were the symbol of state authority. They had become the focus of action against any popular grievance, no matter how far removed from the rail system.

In one incident, students outraged about their exams being too hard marched on the local railway station and burnt it to the ground!

From Calcutta, Diana left by train for southern India. I was heartbroken, and remember waving goodbye at the station, thinking I would never see her again.

So, our little party now separated, with Edwin selling the van, and everyone going their own way. I eventually headed off by plane to Australia, with a stopover at Jakarta, Indonesia.

In Jakarta, I stayed at a lovely old hostel in the city centre. I tried to practise my

elementary Bahasa Indonesia learnt during my first two years at uni, with modest success.

One incident was that I took a bus trip to Bandung, a historic town outside the capital, where the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was originally formed by President Sukarno and other Third World leaders in the mid 1950s. I remember eating a delicious sweet made of avocado and ice.

On my return, I stupidly left my bag including passport under the bus seat, and went back to the hostel. Once I realised I had left my passport behind, I was able to get the assistant manager of the hostel to take me to the bus depot and we succeeded in retrieving the bag.

Boy, was I relieved! And I am eternally thankful for the kindness of that man, and the general friendliness of all the people I met throughout that memorable trip across the world, from London back to Melbourne.

That whole experience overseas during 1967 was life-changing for me. It made me more aware of, and sympathetic to, the peoples and cultures of the Third World especially, and more supportive of their struggles for independence and social progress in a world dominated by the wealthy countries, corporations and governments.

1968: Year of revolutions

1968 was the year of revolutions around the globe. It was also the year I became more involved in radical politics in my own life.

The beginning of that year saw the Vietnamese liberation forces launch their Tet Offensive, which turned the course of the Vietnam War against the US invaders and their allies, including Australia.

These events shook up world politics, and had an impact on my situation as well.

I returned to Melbourne University after a year's absence, and had to re-orient myself to studies after being out of it for a long period.

My main direction was clearly further into political science. My subjects included international relations, Australian politics and political theory.

Under the impact of world events, and reading more deeply in Marxist theory, I became more and more convinced of the truth of Marxism, and the falsity of what passed for pro-capitalist political theory.

On the other hand, I have ever since seen the value of studying writers such as Talcott Parsons, Max Weber, and Daniel Bell, primarily in order to better understand the essential shallowness of their analysis of history and society.

Early in 1968, I moved into a share house in Carlton, right near the uni campus. I remember that house among other things for the sign on the fridge reading, Make Coffee, Not Love.

On the other hand, my relationship with a fellow student, Yvonne Bickley, deepened at that time. I had previously been close before travelling overseas, but in 1968 we became a couple.

Yvonne was a vivacious young woman from western country Victoria, who was also studying political science, and interested in many things in common with myself. At a later stage we lived together for a while.

Then, in a bolt from the blue, Diana wrote to me to say she was coming to Australia, and wanted to visit me in Melbourne. I was happy to see her again, but a bit apprehensive about what this might mean.

When she arrived, I took her home to Mount Eliza to visit the family. And we went on a car trip down the Mornington Peninsula to Portsea and other places.

I remember being very attracted to her again, and she clearly was interested in resuming our relationship. But I couldn't as I felt it would be a betrayal of trust with Yvonne.

So, we eventually parted as friends, with some regret. I continued to correspond with Diana for some years afterwards, and I have since wondered what happened to her in her future life.

During 1968, the political explosions continued. Martin Luther King was assassinated in the US, followed by Robert Kennedy.

In May, the student movement in France erupted in the May-June Paris Revolution. The student demonstrations at the Sorbonne were followed by a general strike of workers which threatened to overthrow the De Gaulle regime and the capitalist system itself.

In Australia, we radical students were inspired. The revolution WAS televised. I remember watching the street battles on the Left Bank, and later saw the debate involving Danny the Red, Alain Krivine, Ernest Mandel and others on the BBC.

In Melbourne, we had our own mini-revolution with the Worker Student Alliance (WSA) revolt at Monash University, in which hundreds of radical students set up barricades and occupied the university administration over local and international issues.

I became more active in student politics at Melbourne Uni. During that period up to the end of 1969, I joined with my friend Mike Richards to set up an alternative *Melbourne University Magazine*, paralleling the official *MUM*, but with radical articles advocating student-staff control of the university and so on.

Anti-war protests also escalated during those two years. The WSA-led annual July 4 march on the US Consulate was commenced.

We used to gather in the City Square and march along St Kilda Road to the consulate, a distance of some five kilometres at least. The Bolte Liberal state government was incensed and sent the police against us.

We were hemmed in by police horses, and usually attacked when we reached the consulate at the corner of Malvern Road. The media went crazy over the “threat to law and order” posed by a few hundred unwashed students.

During this time, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was formed at MU, and the MU Labour Club became more active. I was still involved in the Democratic Socialist Club, and became more involved in the Labor Party.

The main leader of SDS, which later changed its name to Radical Action Movement (RAM) at Melbourne Uni, was Harry van Moorst. I remember Harry was activities officer with the Student Union at one stage, and used to help us do clandestine photocopying of leaflets for rallies, etc., late at night.

I became the Peace and Friendship Officer of the Carlton Central ALP Branch, whose duty it was to build support for the growing anti-war movement. This was one of the initiatives of the Victorian Central Executive of the state Labor Party, led by Bill Hartley and George Crawford.

This was also the time when the left-wing 26 Rebel Unions broke away from the right-wing dominated Victorian Trades Hall Council. It was a tempestuous time in Australian politics, in which the Liberal-Country Party Coalition was kept in office federally and in most states by the far-right Labor Party split-off, the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

Around this stage of my story, some of the dates of my personal saga are a bit hazy. I'm not sure of the exact period I lived in the share house in Carlton, but it was in the rough 1968-69 timeframe.

Some events which did impact on me particularly: The political upheavals of those two years, including the Prague Spring; the massacre of students at the 1968 Mexico Olympics; the so-called Creeping May-June Revolution in Italy; and the other social turmoil of the period.

Around that time, my mother bought me the first car I ever owned: a blue Renault, looking a bit like a Volkswagen Beetle. I remember a wonderful camping trip I did with Yvonne along the Great Ocean Road, to her parents' farm in the Western District of Victoria.

The problem with the car was it used buckets of oil, and leaked continuously. So it didn't last too long, unfortunately.

In 1969 came the big general strike against the penal powers of the Arbitration Act, after Tramways Union Victorian secretary Clarrie O'Shea was jailed for refusing to pay fines over industrial action. That action really emphasised for me the need for an alliance of students and workers to win political change.

I remember the huge rally at Olympic Park, followed by a march of workers through the streets of Melbourne to the Arbitration Commission in the city. I was struck by the looks of horror on the faces of the well-dressed burghers emerging from Myers and George's emporiums when they saw the grey army of workers marching up Bourke Street to the commission.

This was class warfare in the flesh. I felt part of an emerging upsurge by workers and students to challenge the capitalist system, in a time of world revolution. Marx, Engels and Lenin were being vindicated before our very eyes.

Personal life

Around that time, I moved into another share house in Cardigan Street, Carlton, with Yvonne. Sometime after that, she got a job as a teacher in Zambia and moved overseas, much to my sadness.

We corresponded with each other quite regularly for some years, but I knew she had found a new life, and our time together was over.

Then, my parents split up, and Cec bought a house in Bank Street, South Melbourne, where us siblings lived for a couple of years. I do remember being utterly devastated when someone in the house accidentally threw out a brass rubbing Yvonne had given to me, a present which had great sentimental value.

I was so upset, I remember storming out of the house and walking several kilometres in a blind rage to St Kilda, until I managed to cool down. I do have a bit of a temper sometimes, but such outbursts have fortunately been fairly rare in my life.

Another incident from the South Melbourne sojourn was one morning I went to have a shower, using the ancient gas water heater we had in the house. You had to turn the handle inwards to light the gas burner.

When I did this that morning, instead of the usual mini-explosion as the gas ignited, there was merely a pungent smell of burning fur. I looked into the machine and saw a pair of frightened eyes looking out at me.

It was a feral cat which had managed to fall down the chimney and become wedged in the gas burner. We called an emergency plumber who had to dismantle the heater to extract the cat.

The cat had his eyes closed and we thought he was dead. When he was taken outside, wrapped in a towel, he suddenly sprang into action, like Fat Freddy's Cat, and dashed off down the road.

I always imagined he had told the tale to his rough feline mates in the laneways nearby, saying, "Don't go anywhere near that house in Bank Street, they use napalm against you!"

At the end of 1969, I did my final exams and papers for my degree of Bachelor of Arts Honours. Because I was away overseas for the whole of 1967, I was now a year behind the rest of my classmates in Political Science, and so did a special exam in International Relations, as well as other tests.

While my marks had been quite good, H2A mostly, I managed to gain a First Class Honours for that exam, which I was quite please about. I then applied for a grant to do a Masters in the Pol Sci department, to begin in 1970.

I was most disappointed to find it was refused by the Professor, AF (Foo) Davies, a conservative sociologist, who was best known for writing a monograph entitled, *Images of Class in Australia*.

In this, he found that there were 23 or so concepts of class among the people interviewed for the study, so concluded that there were 23 classes in Australia!

Anyway, my mentor in the department, Lloyd Churchward, arranged for an appeal for me and in the end I was awarded an MA grant for two years, including living expenses. This was a great relief, and I am grateful to Lloyd for his assistance.

My chosen topic was the Development of Teacher Unionism in Victoria, based on many interviews conducted in schools with working teachers over that time. This was the period when the Victorian Secondary Teachers Union (VSTA) and the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria (TTAV) were becoming increasingly active and militant.

During the two years 1970-71, I continued to do my interviews with teachers at various Melbourne schools, including Northcote High where Dave Holmes was now teaching science. I interviewed Dave among others, and this was part of the process of us getting closer again, after having been drawn onto separate paths for some years.

I think in retrospect I could have constructed a reasonable thesis on the growth of teacher unionism, but sadly my increasing political activism meant I never did complete the work.

In fact, the tapes on which my interviews were recorded were later recorded over at national committee meetings of the soon-to-be-formed Socialist Workers League. So it now looks like Professor Davies was right in judging that I would never complete my thesis.

However, the main regret I have from this is that I don't remember properly

apologising to Lloyd Churchward for not completing my task, and thanking him fully for his support and assistance over years of study.

During those years 1970-71, I was employed by the Pol Sci Department as a part-time tutor, taking groups of students in Australian politics and then Chinese politics. I enjoyed that work, and the interchange of ideas with younger and older students.

I remember one case in which the students in contemporary Chinese studies were asked to write an essay on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The students knew I was quite left wing, so assumed I would want them to present a glowing account of Mao Tse Tung's factional battle.

So they took their approach from Joan Robinson, and wrote papers beginning thus: "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a popular upsurge led by the Great Helmsman Mao to eliminate the remnants of bourgeois ideology and practice from Communist China." Unfortunately for them, I was not a Maoist, and made comments such as, "What is your evidence for this assertion?" etc., in the margins.

Looking back a little from that time, some political and personal events had occurred which strongly affected my political views and trajectory. First, in late 1969, there was a federal election in which Gough Whitlam led the ALP for the first time, and almost won the election from the Coalition government.

There was a big swing to Labor, which failed to put them over the line, but did the groundwork in preparing for victory in the next poll in 1972. I was more active in the ALP branch at that time, and as president, helped co-ordinate the local campaign in Carlton Central.

It was clear that the anti-Vietnam War movement was growing, and playing an increasing role in undermining support for the Coalition government. Moreover, the youth radicalisation of the 1960s was having a major impact on Australian society, and influencing wider layers of the population, young and old.

While I was more involved than ever in left-wing student politics, I was reading more widely in Marxist theory, including Marx, Engels, Gramsci and the neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School, such as Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse.

I was a keen reader of *New Left Review*, and other left-wing British Marxist journals and books. My commitment to an active life in politics was being confirmed.

But how and where exactly? At the end of 1969, I attended a big Anti-war Conference in Sydney, where I came into contact for the first time with Australian revolutionaries like Jim Percy and Bob Gould.

I was not a central leader of the student anti-war movement, but played a significant supporting role at Melbourne Uni at the time. Earlier, I had co-edited a couple of issues of the Pol Sci Department magazine, *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, with my

friend Steve Staats.

It was around this time that I developed a relationship with Libby Brooke, a fellow Pol Sci student and vivacious person. We moved in together in a share house in Lygon Street, North Carlton, not far from the edge of the Carlton Cemetery.

Libby and I did a lot of things together, including studying, watching films and attending student parties. Much cheap red wine was consumed, by me in any case.

In those days you bought vino in a two-litre glass flagon, rather than the cardboard casks of later years. The bottles were well designed with a large lip, so that drunken students could hold their bottles in a death-grip, even as they passed out leaning against the corridor walls of terrace houses in Carlton late at night.

Libby came from a Polish Jewish family, originally named Brukavich, Anglicised to Brooke in Australia. Her parents were post-war refugees who had survived the Nazi death camps, and settled in Melbourne, establishing a clothing shop in Moonee Ponds.

I remember visiting their home quite often for lunch or dinner, where we ate delicious dishes such as gefiltefish, and I learnt the Yiddish word for sheep, shepsilah. I even ate with them at Passover once or twice.

This was an excellent example of genuine multiculturalism in practice in Australian society. The Jewish community in Australia, and Melbourne in particular, has made a significant contribution to the variety and vitality of the country.

However, the one main divisive issue was Israel and Palestine. While the Brookes were sympathetic to the Palestinians, their loyalty to Israel as a supposed haven for the Jews against anti-Semitism was deeply engrained.

I remember having a number of intense discussions with them over dinner about Middle East issues, especially as I had recently returned from Egypt and experienced Israeli militarism in the Six Day War.

Libby and I eventually split up. I can't remember why, but there was no serious bitterness that I can recall.

1970: Vietnam Moratorium

During 1970, the Moratorium movement against the Vietnam War developed rapidly. In May that year, the largest anti-war marches ever seen in Australia occurred around the country.

As an activist in the Melbourne Uni anti-war group, I was involved in helping to organise preparations for the big day. A major public meeting was called in the Student Union the night before to debate the proposition: "That Melbourne University should

close down on May 8 to support the Vietnam Moratorium.”

A panel of speakers arguing for and against addressed a huge gathering of at least 1000 students and staff. Passionate arguments were advanced by anti-war speakers such as Doug Kirsner and Kelvin Rowley, and pro-war zealots like Frank Knopfelmacher and Gerard Henderson.

It was a highlight of my life to that time that the vote at the end was overwhelmingly in favor of closing the university for the day. A key slogan of the Moratorium was “Stop work to stop the war!”

It was such a joy to see Knopfelmacher storm out of the meeting, declaring that we had all been duped by the Communists and the peaceniks. It was a turning point in the battle of ideas over the war, and we had won.

Around that time, radical students at Melbourne Uni organised a blockade of the university administration building, to protest the refusal of the university authorities to admit Maoist student leader from Monash Albert Langer to a post-graduate degree. I remember we grabbed some bricks and cement from a nearby construction site and bricked up the entrance to the admin building.

Eventually, the university managed to bring in the police and broke open the blockade wall. But it was a high point of student militant action at MU.

On Moratorium day, we organised a feeder march from the uni downtown to where the demonstration was to start. I remember clearly my feeling of exultation when we arrived at the top of Bourke Street to see the whole street absolutely filled with people opposing the war.

This included a little old grandmother with a placard reading, “I am a pack-raping bikie.” Earlier, then Liberal Prime Minister Billie Snedden had accused the Moratorium protesters of being “Bikies pack-raping democracy.”

Estimates of the turn-out in Melbourne, the biggest of the national protests, range from 70,000 to 100,000. From that point on, the pro-war forces were on the back foot, and public sentiment turned ever more massively against the Vietnam intervention.

Another Moratorium demonstration took place in September 1970, which was almost as big as the first one. The pressure was really mounting for withdrawal of Australian forces from Vietnam.

It was around this time that I properly reconnected with my old friend Dave Holmes. He had gradually become politically radicalised over the previous few years, and become a convinced Marxist.

He says I influenced his development by giving him copies of *Towards Socialism* and the *New Left Review* to read. One story goes that when he was a physics student, he had undertaken the all-night shift at the Melbourne Uni Physics Department

cyclotron, and utilised his time by reading the works of Marx and Engels!

Then, when he was living in a share house in Carlton during 1970, his flatmate Goh Siong Ho left a copy of the revolutionary-socialist newspaper *Direct Action* in the outside toilet, where Dave had read it with growing enthusiasm.

He realised that *DA*, and its parent organisation the Socialist Youth Alliance (formerly Resistance), was the answer to what he had been searching for for years: a viewpoint and an organisation which posed a revolutionary Marxist way forward for the working class and the Third World, in the face of an increasingly aggressive imperialist system.

Dave joined SYA, and soon started pressuring me to do the same. I resisted at first, as I sought to defend my precious status as an “independent Marxist.”

However, I soon became clear to me that I could not seriously justify not joining SYA, which offered the most progressive and far-reaching analysis of the crisis of capitalism and Stalinism, and a method for advancing the struggle. ■

3. Joining the Socialist Movement

SYA was a Trotskyist youth organisation, aligned with the Fourth International, which had been founded in 1938 by Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his collaborators such as US revolutionary socialists James P. Cannon and Joseph Hansen.

By early 1971 I was a member of SYA, and then its embryonic party group, the Socialist Workers League, which was founded in the first part of that year. Soon I was caught up in the activism of the movement, with regular meetings, demos and forums.

I began mixing with the comrades, including John Percy, Jamie Doughney, Alan Dalton, Jane Beckman, Mary Merkenich and Jenny Ferguson. I was soon elected onto the SYA executive, and my life became increasingly centred on the revolutionary movement and its activities.

We were heavily involved in the preparations for the third Moratorium, set for July 1971. SYA and SWL were a rather small group, but played an important role in the debates and discussions facing the anti-war movement at the time.

In the lead-up to the July Moratorium, a huge general organising meeting was called for the Richmond Town Hall, attracting at least 1000 activists. The Moratorium was led by Labor left-winger Dr Jim Cairns, as well as Communist Party of Australia leaders and their co-thinkers in the CICD (Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament).

It was a real coalition of forces, including the churches, progressive unions, ALP branches, and other political parties and organisations, such as the Australia Party, and other left groups, including the Maoist WSA and CPA(M-L), and ourselves, the Trotskyists.

Before the Richmond TH mass meeting, I remember coming up to the entrance to the hall in Alan Dalton's old Holden car, with a bunch of other comrades. He got so nervous at the sight of a mob of hostile Maoists, that he crashed into a pillar of the archway at the drive-in entrance to the hall.

The Maoists jeered, "Your driving's no better than your politics!" And Alan sped away to escape the humiliation.

Inside, we 20-30 Trotskyists sat together in a bloc, as a defence against the hundreds of red-flag wielding WSAers, chanting slogans like, “The only good Trot is a dead one!” and wearing badges with a large icepick on them. Nevertheless, despite the heckling and the bureaucratic manoeuvres of the Moratorium leaders on the platform, we gave quite a good account of ourselves in the debate.

We always pushed for a fully democratic structure for the Moratorium organisation, to facilitate the broadest possible public participation, and in support of the demands for, “Troops out now!” and “End conscription!” We felt that these demands would bring the most number of people to join the movement.

This was counterposed to the conservative forces calling for “Stop the bombing! Negotiate!” and the ultra-lefts like the Maoists who insisted on the demand for “Victory to the Viet Cong! Smash imperialism!”

Another part of the anti-war campaign was the anti-conscription and draft resistance struggle. At one stage, 3DR (Draft Resister), was set up as a rebel radio station, operating from homes and vans, and constantly moving to escape the Federal Police.

The highlight was an occupation of MU Student Union, with 3DR broadcasting from the top floor. We blockaded the staircases with overturned chairs and waited for a dawn raid by the cops.

Sure enough, they invaded in the early morning, breaking glass doors (which were not locked), and stormed upstairs, pushing our sit-down protest out of the way. Of course, they found nothing, as 3DR had been spirited away during the night.

I can't remember whether the authorities ever captured 3DR, but it continued to broadcast anti-war messages and music for some time.

At the end of 1971, the annual deferral of my call-up finally ran out. I received a letter ordering me to attend a medical interview prior to conscription.

Figuring that going underground as a draft resister was not the solution, nor was conscientious objection. the idea occurred to me that as I had suffered a bad case of eczema over the previous few years, I would be rejected as medically unfit to travel to tropical climes.

Of course, as luck would have it, the eczema went away shortly before the medical. I sat in my car, outside the armed forces medical centre in Melbourne, rubbing furiously on my arms with a rough cloth to bring back the rash. Naturally, by the time I had sat half an hour in the waiting room, the evidence went right away.

Plan B was to pretend to have a psychological problem. I attempted to appear depressed and uncooperative with the doctor.

In the end, to my joy the doctor announced that I was medically unfit for the army

because of “flat feet”! (I don’t actually have that particular ailment, so it appeared the military was not anxious to have yet another political malcontent in their ranks, at this late stage of the game).

Whatever works! Another comrade, Dave Kerin, was rejected after appearing at the medical with the *Selected Works* of Lenin under his arm!

Through the period 1971-72, we held regular weekly protests in the City Square on all kinds of issues, including: support for the Irish Republican struggle, independence for Papua New Guinea, opposition to the repression of the JVP in Sri Lanka, defence of Aboriginal land rights and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, and the independence movement for Bangladesh.

In the last case, we used to collect funds from the public to aid the Mukti Fouj, or maybe it was the Mukti Bahini. We weren’t sure of the difference, but thought the Mukti Bahini was the armed wing of the Mukti Fouj.

In the end, we were not sure how to send the money we collected to them, so we forwarded it to the Indian section of the FI instead.

During this time, we held many *Direct Action* forums on various topics. One I remember was on the revolutionary movement in Bolivia. At the end of the talk, the chairperson announced, “We’ll now have a break for coffee, followed by time for questions and discussion.”

Keith Olerhead, then a member of the ultra-left Spartacist League, leapt to his feet, declaring, “Comrades! What will it be, coffee or communism?” We opted for coffee for the time being. Those were heady days of revolutionary enthusiasm, even craziness at times.

We were in a constant battle, sometimes literally, with the Maoists for influence on the youth in those days. They threatened us on a number of occasions.

I remember at one time, after we were warned of violence at a May Day march, we carried out defence classes in Sherbrooke Forest in the Dandenong Ranges with trainer Dave Kerin, learning how to use a cake of soap in a sock as a weapon!

Then Steve Painter got into a fist fight with one Maoist outside a meeting of the May Day Committee in the Victorian Trades Hall Council building. Steve eventually got the better of the duel, with the help of another comrade, John Barker, which was good for our morale.

May Day in those days in Melbourne was a big march and festival. We used to march in formation, carrying huge banners mounted on frames, with pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and lots of placards and red flags.

We were also in competition with the Socialist Labour League (SLL), a workerist split-off from the Fourth International, for recruitment and influence among

radicalising youth. But no one was going to beat us for militancy and identification with the symbols and leaders of the Marxist revolutionary movement!

The early 1970s

We had some eccentric characters ourselves in those days. One was Ivan Repak, a Yugoslav socialist, who punched out the chief of the Police Special Branch at one May Day, and then made a run for it, eventually hiding in the toilet at our headquarters at 140 Queensberry Street, Carlton.

Our headquarters was a hive of activity in those days. John Percy and Jenny Ferguson lived upstairs at one stage. Renfrey Clarke also lived upstairs when we rented next door, number 136, for the SWL office.

This was also the period of the rise of the Second Wave of Feminism. The women's liberation movement was growing and radicalising.

I remember one campaign for a child-care centre at Melbourne University which culminated in an occupation of the Student Union by women, co-led by our comrade Mary Merkenich.

On the personal side of things, my period on the MA grant ran out at the end of 1971. My MA was never completed, unfortunately.

In 1972, I started a one-year Diploma of Education course at Latrobe University, in preparation for becoming a teacher myself.

Latrobe had taken over from Monash University as the main hotbed of student radicalism in Melbourne at the time. During that year, Maoist leader Barry York was suspended from the university for refusing a directive.

In response, we students occupied the administration building for months, and the whole campus was in uproar for six months or more. We staged a student strike in protest.

Fortunately for me, my main education lecturer was Doug White, a Maoist and co-editor of *Arena* magazine. We were able to pass our course, even though we missed many classes, by doing extra essays and special exams late in the year.

I remember doing one term paper, which I was rather proud of, on the progressive education theories of Paolo Freire, a liberation theology Brazilian priest. I would like to see if I can find it again one day.

During the year, we did two teacher training placements in schools. One in particular I recall was with Moreland High School, which was a progressive school with innovative courses and methods.

I remember doing a variety of activities with the students, including playing chess. My chess game improved a lot trying to match some of those prodigies at that school!

At the end of 1972, I finished my formal studies with a Dip Ed, and prepared to start a career as a secondary school teacher.

Regarding my social life at that time, after parting from Libby, there was a bit of a solo period, broken only by a few short liaisons, with three women comrades, including Jenny Ferguson, Yvonne Almond and another person, Kate.

I had moved into another share house in Lygon Street, across the road and just down the street from the previous place where I had lived with Libby previously. I recall spending time in various pubs in the area, and imbibing much beer, wine and veal parmigianas.

Our favorite café throughout those years was Genevieve's, where I note you could buy a nice rigatoni pasta in the 1960s for about 40 cents! Genevieve's was right next to the Bughouse Cinema, where we used to watch many of the avant garde movies of that era, especially the French New Wave films of Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol etc.

During that time, I lived in a few houses in Carlton, including in Lygon Street and Drummond Street. Carlton was a cosmopolitan centre in the 1960s and '70s, all proportions guarded.

During the latter part of 1972, the campaign for the historic elections of December that year began. During 1972, I was involved in the Socialist Left of the Victorian Labor Party, which had become a mass movement in those years.

Meetings of up to 1000 left-wing ALP members took place in the Collingwood Town Hall and elsewhere. Lively debates took place on the Vietnam War and other key issues.

That was the only time that a truly broad-based, radical movement existed inside the ALP in the modern era. The movement was later to be killed off by right and left Labor bureaucrats, as progressives deserted the ALP in droves, later to join the Nuclear Disarmament Party in the 1980s, and then the Greens from the 1990s onwards.

I continued to maintain my ALP membership ticket throughout the 1970s, but let it lapse at the end of the decade. While, in principle, socialist political work inside the ALP could be possible in future, it seems a particularly fruitless venture in the current period.

In August 1972, we in the SWL launched the "Socialists For Labor Campaign." I wrote articles for *DA* on "Why socialists should support the ALP," and "Labor to power in '72," etc.

Our line at the time was that the ALP was a workers' party, hijacked by the bureaucratic, reformist leadership. Unions and workers should support Labor, and

“fight for socialist policies”.

It was a forlorn hope, but at least had a little more credibility in those days than now, when Labor is a totally pro-business party which is an instrument of neoliberal consensus, and has essentially lost the bulk of any pro-worker policies derived from its historic union base.

In September 1972, I spoke at a Direct Action Forum with then SL leaders Bob Hogg and Kevin Healy, about the politics of the ALP and the role of the Socialist Left.

I wrote a series of articles in DA under the themes of “The ALP and inflation”, “Foreign investment and the ALP”, “Labor and the economic crisis”, and finally, after the big election victory of the Gough Whitlam-led ALP in December 1972, “What to expect from a Labor government”.

These articles all slammed ALP policies, but came back to the central idea of critical support for Labor as a workers’ party with a bureaucratic leadership. This was to be a political straitjacket for our politics for another decade from 1972.

The 1972 election campaign was especially memorable. Whitlam was swept to power by a huge majority, on a wave of popular disillusionment with a Liberal government, which had been in office for 23 years.

The mass movement against the Vietnam War carried the ALP along with it, together with the other social movements which had emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s — women’s liberation, Aboriginal rights, gay liberation, and the youth radicalisation generally.

The McMahon government was tossed out, amid general rejoicing and high hopes for genuine change from the incoming Labor administration. There was a period of significant reform, followed by a slowing down, and then stalling of the motor for change from the ALP. Unfortunately, the Whitlam era was essentially one of reform within the system, not a break from the capitalist order.

Many people were to become sorely disillusioned in the next few years. This, and the growing world economic crisis from 1973 onwards, prepared the ground for the right wing in the media and politics to launch a counterattack on Whitlam and eventually bring him crashing down.

My teaching career

1973 opened another period in my life, when I commenced my brief, somewhat inglorious career, as a teacher. Having graduated with my Diploma of Education at the end of 1972, I applied for various teaching jobs for the new year.

In the end, I took a position in the Humanities Section of Broadmeadows West Technical School, situated close to the huge Ford factory in the north-western, working-class area of Broadmeadows. Broadie Tech was a boys only school, designed to train young males for trades, and certainly not for university.

Humanities was a sideline there, and it showed. The Humanities wing was dubbed the Madhouse, and no one took the subjects we taught — English and Social studies — very seriously.

We had a definite discipline problem, and as a new and inexperienced teacher, I was a real novice. I am grateful for the assistance of my colleagues, particularly the head of humanities, who became a friend as well as guide at that time.

I remember being frustrated by the antics of some students, and telling the trouble-makers to be quiet, even if they were not interested in geography or literature, and allow those students who wanted to work to get on with it.

We had a team-teaching system, which included having problem kids sit out the class in a room within the staff-room area, under the guidance of the off-duty teachers. One especially naughty student was a big Turkish boy, named Baki, who constantly played up, probably because he was teased by the other students all the time.

The stress of the job meant we Broadie West teachers all went to a nearby pub on Friday afternoons to try to recover. My social life did centre on our group of teachers and their friends for a while there.

In particular, I used to visit my head humanities teacher's house in Pascoe Vale. A student nurse and I became close friends, but unfortunately nothing closer came of it in the end.

Ever since that teaching experience I have great respect and sympathy for all teachers. It is a difficult job, and insufficiently unrewarded, either financially or with credit.

My career only lasted about six months as it turned out. I ended up resigning in order to begin my professional political career in the socialist movement, which has basically continued in one form or another ever since.

I then became full-time organiser for the Socialist Workers League in Melbourne from mid-1973 until mid-1974. During that time, we continued to operate from our offices at 136 and 140 Queensberry Street, Carlton.

From research into the early years of our paper *Direct Action*, I can see that I was writing regular articles for *DA* from June 1971. My first article, in *DA* Number 7, June 1971, was about the student occupation of the Melbourne University administration building against the exclusion of Maoist leader Albert Langer from entry to the uni, and other issues regarding university democracy.

I remember the students bricked up the entrance to the building, blockading it for a time. Eventually, police were called in to break down the brick wall and release those inside.

Later articles that year included reports on the ongoing fight over university discipline charges, and the police dawn raid on the Melbourne Uni union building in November 1971.

During that period I collaborated with my friend Mike Richards from the Political Science Department in producing an alternative university magazine, counterposed to the official *Melbourne University Magazine*, which ran articles on issues of student and staff rights, and worker-student control of the university, as well as opposition to the Vietnam War.

I also wrote a series of articles for *DA* over the next few years dealing with the rising militancy of school teachers, and the strengthening of teacher unionism at the time. Industrial action, including strikes, were a regular occurrence in those years. It was part of the rise of industrial militancy in general, but also a specific matter of the increased proletarianisation of teachers and white collar workers in general.

Other topics for articles I wrote during those years, 1971-72, included: the independence struggle in Bangladesh; the power workers' strike in the Latrobe Valley in March 1972; the development of the Victorian ALP Socialist Left; and preparations for the big election campaign of December 1972, which brought the Whitlam Labor government to power.

In January 1973, I had my first experience of international left politics, attending the national conference of the New Zealand Socialist Action League (SAL) in Wellington. The SAL were also a section of the Fourth International, like us, and factional allies with the SWL and the US Socialist Workers Party in the ongoing dispute with the supporters of Belgian Marxist Ernest Mandel in the International Majority Tendency (IMT).

It was a novel experience for me to attend the SAL conference, and I made a number of long-lasting friendships there. This was the first of several trips I have since made to beautiful NZ — Aoteroa, the “Land of the Long White Cloud.”

After the election of Whitlam in December 1972, I continued to write regular articles for *DA* on a variety of topics: “Whitlam’s new Asia policy;” “Which way for the Socialist Left?” (March 1973); the Victorian elections of May 1973; etc.

In May 1973, I attended and wrote about the Workers’ Control Conference in Newcastle, NSW, mainly sponsored by the CPA and its union officials.

In June 1973, veteran US Marxist philosopher George Novack toured Australia, and I helped organise his public meeting in Melbourne. It was a big success, and filled

a big meeting room in the University Union, with considerable interest from students and staff at Melbourne Uni.

I continued to write articles on teacher unionism and education, the Whitlam government's foreign policy, and other issues.

In August 1973, the SWL sponsored a defence campaign for Alain Krivine and other leaders of the LCR (Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire), the French section of the FI, who were being persecuted by the French government. I addressed a large public meeting on the topic, along with a broad line-up of representatives of left parties and organisations in Melbourne.

My articles in *DA* in the 1973-74 period included: Détente and Australian politics (September 1973); the fall of Chinese leader Lin Piao (September 1973); the Victorian migrant workers' conference (October 1973); the prices and incomes referendum (November 1973); and the Bill of Rights (December 1973).

In January 1974, I presented a political report at the SWL National Conference, reported in *DA*.

In February 1974, the right-wing leadership of the Victorian Young Labor Association expelled 34 socialists, in a red-baiting witch-hunt, aimed against SYA. While many of those expelled were SYA members, a number were not — including myself, who was on the list of expulsions, even though I was too old to be a YLA member at the time!

As 1974 went on, I wrote articles on Labor's new diplomacy (April 1974); Australia's "new nationalism," and the ALP and ASIO (June 1974). I also wrote about Labor Minister Clyde Cameron's wage indexation scheme when it was introduced in July that year.

Transfer to Sydney

Then, I was asked to transfer to Sydney to go on full time with our newspaper *Direct Action*. I accepted, and in July 1974, packed up my belongings and drove to Sydney, along with my new companion Jenny Eastwood.

Jenny became my first long-term relationship since breaking up with Libby Brooke. She was a dedicated socialist and feminist, from a staunch working-class family in the western suburbs.

On our way to Sydney in Jenny's little blue Mazda car, we stopped off at my family's farm co-operative at Bonang, in far eastern Gippsland. At that time, my mother Cec, brother Bob and his partner Deb, and my sister Fiona lived at the co-op

with their children.

I recall staying in the old hut, in the middle of winter, and waking up in the morning to find the top few inches of water in the bucket outside the door frozen solid. While it got very cold in winter, Bonang also suffered considerable heat and drought in summer.

My immediate family were divided into "socialist wing", and the "hippy wing", to oversimplify definitions somewhat.

The family members who set up the co-operative in Bonang were pioneers of the rural communal movement, which grew up in that period, and still exists to some extent in the East Gippsland area, northern NSW, and some parts of southern Queensland.

Jenny became the co-ordinator of the Women's Abortion Action Campaign (WAAC) in Melbourne, and agreed to move to Sydney with me to become the national co-ordinator of WAAC. The campaign for the right to choose for women had emerged as a key issue for the women's liberation movement at that time, and also a major priority for SWL and SYA.

For a period in the mid-1970s, WAAC had its own office where Jenny worked in Sydney. Also at that time, the WLM had its own headquarters, Women's House, where all the women's rights organisations used to meet and plan campaigns.

Jenny and I initially moved into the house at 44 Wigram Road, Glebe, where Jim Percy, his brother John, and Nita Keig lived.

Eventually, Jenny and I moved into a share house in Annandale, not too far from where my younger sister Fran lived in Glebe at the time. Jenny and I were both very active in movement and party work for a couple of years there. Meanwhile, Fran and her son (my nephew) Dayo, moved in with Jenny and me, and some others, at the house in Johnston Street, Annandale. Next door resided the Flicks, Isobel and Barbara, an Aboriginal family from country NSW. We became good neighbours and friends.

In 1976, we moved into a small house at 67 O'Connor Street, Chippendale — me, Jenny, Fran and Dayo. Part of the reason was for Fran and Dayo to escape from her violent former partner, Darkie, who was lurking around.

The plan was that, if Darkie ever showed up at O'Connor Street, I was to block the front door for long enough so that Fran and young Dayo could flee out the back gate to safety. I'm not sure how effective that plan would ever have been in practice, as Darkie was a huge man with "a licence on his hands", who was alleged to have killed a man in a fight in Germany years ago!

Anyway, he never showed up, so the plan was never tested out — thank goodness!

In mid-late 1976, we all moved out of O'Connor Street, Fran and Dayo to Avon

Street, Glebe, and Jenny and I back to Wigram Road.

Jenny got a job in the Redfern Mail Centre, a hotbed of radical unionism in those days. We were happy together, but all good things must come to an end, I suppose.

In the event, I was taken totally by surprise when Jenny decided to separate, and move in with her new woman companion. It was the first and only time one of my partners left me for another woman!

C'est la vie moderne! That's modern life for you!

Working for *Direct Action*

Meanwhile, I was busy working full time on the SWL newspaper *Direct Action*. I worked there as a journalist and proof-reader from mid-1974 until December 1980.

When we arrived in Sydney, the SWL and SYA were operating from an office in St Johns Road, Glebe, where the paper was edited, typeset on an old-fashioned IBM typewriter, laid out and proof-read.

Initially, the editor was John Percy, with Nita Keig taking over shortly afterwards. In the early days, *DA* came out monthly or so, then three-weekly and eventually weekly, in late 1975.

As time went by, I used to write a number of articles for each issue, and so adopted the pseudonym of John Compton to prevent my name being used so often in the paper.

1973 was a turbulent year in Australian politics. The Whitlam government had made some important reforms in its early period, but was soon running into heavy weather, and the reform program slowed down considerably.

Two key issues during that year were the wage-price freeze referendum, and wage indexation. This was in the context of the 1973 oil crisis, and the international economic recession.

The SWL decided to oppose Whitlam's wage-price referendum, and we campaigned strongly against it in *DA*.

The early days of working on *Direct Action* from 1974 are a blur. But I can remember a number of episodes clearly.

I worked closely with Nita Keig as *DA* editor in those days. I remember we did overnights, or even two overnight stints sometimes, to finish off the *DA* editing, subediting and proofreading in the days of the three-weekly *DA*.

There were some rough edges in production at times, but it was still a miracle of dedication and hard work that the paper came out at all. I still marvel at the degree of

professionalism and artistry that our comrades working on the paper display with *Green Left Weekly* today.

We used to seek out the cheapest printer in Sydney in those early days, by following the porn mags like *Kings Cross Whisper* around, as they always found the least expensive printer in town.

On one occasion, in the mid-1970s, when Dave Holmes became editor for a time, we played a trick on him by putting a nude centre-page from the KCW in the middle of a copy of *DA* we gave to Dave after returning from the printers.

He was horrified, and yelled out, “Burn the lot, don’t let it get out!” He was not very amused when we told him it was only a joke.

For a while there, when Nita was editor, she and I would drive out to Windsor on the western edge of Sydney in the early hours to take the *DA* lay-out to the cheapest printer out there at that time. We would then park at the edge of the Nepean River and sleep in the car till the job was done.

You had to have two people take the paper out because one was driving and the other had to keep the driver awake. One morning, we were rudely awoken by some cops, wanting to know what we were up to there.

At the early Resistance Centre in St Johns Road, Glebe, we used to have our meetings downstairs, and *DA* production upstairs, with some comrades living on the top floor. It was an interesting mixture.

One amusing incident involved a Jumble Sale for *DA*, held in the street outside the office. The branch organiser at that time was Al Westwood, one of the founders of the original Resistance, who lived in the St Johns Road house.

He had put out his washing, and it got mixed up with the jumble. I remember him running down the road after a hippy on a bicycle, who had gleefully purchased Al’s only valuable clothing for \$2 — a penguin suit worth hundreds of dollars!

Another incident occurred during the 1975 election campaign. I and Dr Gordon Adler, an early stalwart of the SWL, went out on a paste-up of SWL election posters, and decided to start on the front wall of the Resistance Centre office.

Two police drove up and challenged Gordon, “Have you got permission from the owner to put material on that premises?” “Well, yes,” Gordon replied. “I’m actually the co-owner of the building.”

During the year 1975, a number of notable events took place. In January, a remarkable Resistance Education Camp was held at Ocean Grove, on the Victorian Great Ocean Road.

Afterwards, the famous front cover of the Melbourne *Sunday Herald* proclaimed, “Sex, Sin and Terror.” The infamous ASIO spy Max Wechsler had spilled the beans on

our alleged activities at the camp.

I remember laughing uproariously at the article. I asked myself, I remember the sin and terror, but what about the sex?

Another major development was the attack on the NSW Builders Labourers Federation by federal BLF secretary Norm Gallagher and the NSW Master Builders Association. The NSW BLF, with their Green Bans and progressive social policies, had become the most politically advanced union in the country.

I remember Al Westwood and I spent a lot of time talking to BLF leaders Jack Munday, Joe Owens and Bob Pringle, offering support, and urging them to broaden the defence struggle into a united front political movement. We were instrumental in organising a big solidarity march in support of the NSW BLs.

However, the battle was eventually lost, unfortunately. The episode remains one of the most important memories of my own political history.

Another one was the campaign in defence of the Brisbane Three. Dennis Walker, John Garcia and Lionel Fogarty were charged with “attempting to obtain money with threats and menaces” over a spurious incident at University of Queensland, and pursued by the Joh Bjelke-Petersen regime.

I was heavily involved in the Defend the Brisbane Three Committee in Sydney, and remember my first trip to Brisbane, accompanying Dennis Walker when he flew there for a High Court hearing. We gathered around Dennis when he walked off the plane at Brisbane Airport to prevent Queensland Special Branch cops from seizing him.

That was my first encounter with Queensland politics, which I was later to come to understand much more directly.

Fall of Saigon

Then came the historic fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War on April 30, 1975. We reacted immediately and worked all night to put out a Special Edition of *DA*, with the cover, “Victory to the Vietnamese people!”

That issue was so popular, we sold out in a couple of days. It was a moment of great celebration, in Vietnam, internationally and in Australia.

I personally felt proud to have played a small part in supporting that great liberation struggle, which changed the course of world history. Irrespective of the outcome of the changes now occurring in Vietnam, that heroic resistance struggle is one of the greatest popular movements in history.

All this time, I was writing regular articles on the beginnings of the decline and fall of the Whitlam government, culminating in the Canberra Coup of November 1975. As the anti-Labor campaign mounted, led by the Coalition opposition and the Murdoch press, the ALP moved further to the right.

I had earlier written an article in September 1974 criticising Whitlam for refusing to support East Timorese independence. Meanwhile, the world economy was collapsing, dragging Australia down with it.

After the Kerr sacking on November 11, 1975, the political crisis came to a head. The class struggle reached a historic turning point.

We were sure a call by Whitlam and ACTU leader Bob Hawke on the unions and the labour movement to launch a general strike could have been successful in turning back the reactionary tide. *DA* campaigned for a General Strike, but the ALP and union leaderships called for calm.

I remember talking to maritime workers who were considering seizing rifles from the gunshops in George Street, in preparation for opposing the military coup many thought was about to occur. The political tension was growing.

Huge rallies were held in Hyde Park in Sydney, and in Melbourne, and workers spontaneously walked off the job, but no general strike was called. The ALP leadership allowed the mass movement to subside, and redirected it into the coming federal elections — a strategy which failed dismally, as Malcolm Fraser and the Coalition were elected overwhelmingly.

Out of this historic crisis, the SWL ran our first candidates, changed our name to the Socialist Workers Party, and commenced publication of *DA* as a weekly newspaper, from the beginning of 1976. It was a turning point in the history of our tendency, as well as the nation.

I remember presenting the Australian Politics report to the founding SWP Conference in January 1976, which was later published, along with the SWP Political Resolution, by Resistance Books under the title *Towards a Socialist Australia*. This was my first book publication (under the name of the party), and makes interesting reading so many years later.

During 1976, I continued to work full time on *Direct Action*, as Labour Editor, writing many articles, and proof-reading much of the paper. In those days, there was an increase in union struggles, and I covered many of them for *DA*.

I slammed the Fraser government's attacks on the unions and its new anti-union legislation. Other issues included the Liberal government's wage cuts, assaults on the public sector, and reduction in social welfare.

It is ironic in light of Malcolm Fraser's more recent move in the progressive direction

around refugees, etc., to remind ourselves that his government launched an all-out war on the working class and the poor during the 1970s. Resistance issued a T-shirt with the slogan, “Give Fraser a break. Break one of his legs!”

One interesting sidelight during May 1976 was the Lisa Walter Affair, when a young woman “came out” as an ASIO spy in Resistance, and we pulled off a sting on the secret police agency by photographing and taping her meeting her “control” in a carpark in Adelaide. The *National Times* ran a big story on the issue, and I did a major interview with Lisa for *DA*.

Then in June 1976, the union movement commenced an important campaign against Fraser’s plan to abolish Whitlam’s national health scheme, Medibank. This culminated in a nation-wide general strike in July.

I wrote the front-page article for *DA* reporting the general strike, one of the first and biggest in Australian industrial history. The country was effectively closed down on that day — which showed the immense power of the organised workers, when they act in a united and determined fashion.

However, the ACTU under Bob Hawke’s leadership failed to follow up sufficiently, and Medibank was lost. The Medibank campaign showed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Australian labour movement.

Around that stage, Jenny and I parted company. I was sad to lose her, but that’s life. For a few years then, I was alone, save for a couple of short flings with women comrades of the time.

Meeting Coral & Chantal

Coral (Wynter, nee Channells) and I met at the *Direct Action* office in 1978. An early memory is that we talked while I was doing the job of clipping the newspapers, a product of pre-internet technology required for writing the next week’s articles. Another early event was having a drink and playing pool together at the Great Southern Hotel, near the SWP/*DA* office of the time in Haymarket, Sydney.

Coral claims she had to buy most of the drinks because I had no money!

We also got to know each other while helping prepare the dinner at Wigram Road for a Direct Action Banquet being held in the Glebe Town Hall. I distinctly remember crying my eyes out peeling and slicing onions for the sumptuous dinner being cooked by our chef extraordinaire and gourmet national secretary Jim Percy.

Coral and I knew we had a mutual attraction from the night of that dinner. We got together soon after the night of a big public meeting to commemorate the 40th

anniversary of the Founding of the Fourth International, September 1, 1938.

She was reluctant to over-commit at first, as she had had a bad experience in England, having to flee a domestic violence situation to Venezuela, before returning to Australia. She had left Britain, many months pregnant with daughter Chantal, who was born in Caracas.

Coral claims, only half-joking, that she was also suspicious that I had been assigned by Jim on behalf of the SWP leadership to “horizontally recruit” her! She was a supporter of the International Majority Tendency (IMT), the Mandelista or European wing, of the FI, and a member of the Communist League in Australia after she returned from overseas.

The Australian SWP were Cannonites, or supporters of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction (LTF), headed by the US SWP of the time. The CL and the SWP were moving toward reunification, after a split in Australia going back to 1972.

Coral had been recruited to the International Marxist Group (IMG) in London in the early 1970s, and was a bit of an ultraleftist in those days, I reckoned. Anyway, she, her comrades Dick Nichols, Pat Brewer, Chris Slee and others were part of the fusion between the SWP and the CL in 1978, which strengthened the party at that time.

I will always remember one of her first interventions in an internal party discussion around that time in which she declared that we should change the name of our *DA* Banquets to *DA* Dinners, as that would be more attractive to ordinary workers.

She actually won the day on that issue, and our big events have been called Dinners ever since!

Soon, I moved in with Coral and Chantal at their home at 44 Shepherd Street, Chippendale, a charming two-storey terrace house. Coral says she gave me three months to shape up or ship out! I am now still there over 40 years later, so something must have worked out!

Chantal was a beautiful little girl, so affectionate. Soon she and I became father and daughter, quite naturally. We have loved and supported one another ever since.

She had a hearing problem, which was only diagnosed later, which resulted in a speech problem in the early years. Because of this, she developed her own words, which I still remember to this day: “I wanna Oh,” which meant “I want an ice cream;” “You fuckal idiot,” (obvious); and so on.

The problem was eventually resolved by an ear operation at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Annandale a couple of years later. She has said she always regarded me as her real Dad, which is something I really appreciate and treasure.

During the period 1978 to 1980, I continued to work as a full-time journalist on *DA*, with the title of Labour Editor, covering trade union and labour movement affairs

particularly. This was a period of growing union unrest against the Fraser Liberal government, as well as the rise of the anti-uranium movement and other issues.

The SWP, following the US SWP, decided to take a “turn to industry,” which was based on the analysis that the industrial working class was moving into action in a big way around the advanced capitalist world. Thus, our revolutionary parties had to be embedded in basic industry with them, in order to help lead the imminent radicalisation which would inevitably occur.

The Australian SWP, along with its US mentor, sent a majority of its cadre to work in basic industrial jobs, in the metal, steel, vehicle, transport and other industries. Coral got a job in Plesseys telecommunications cable factory in Western Sydney. She was undoubtedly the only PhD employed on the production line in a processing plant in the whole city!

She learnt a lot from this experience, made a number of staunch friends, and returned to her working-class roots. (She had been born and raised in Bankstown and Greenacre, and never fails to remind me that she and her brother Geoff had to survive on bread and dripping, while I supposedly was brought up with a silver spoon in my mouth!)

Later on, she somewhat resented the fact that her scientific career was probably affected in the long run by this period out of the university workforce. She had been trained as a biochemist, and gained her PhD at London University.

We both joke about the fact that she had fought her way by grit and determination, and talent, out of the working class into the middle class, only to be tossed back into the proletariat by a political decision of the party — only to find out later that we reversed the turn after events showed a mass uprising of the labour movement was not actually happening on a general scale in the West.

On the other hand, I point out, I was well on the way to proceeding from a middle class upbringing to a position in academia or in the teaching profession, when I (quite enthusiastically, I fully admit) decided to pursue a career as a socialist revolutionary, and was assigned to a role in the SWP newspaper *Direct Action*, full time but very lowly paid.

Thus is the irony of history and personal life!

Chantal attended pre-school at Blackfriars in Chippendale, and then Primary School. I always remember being woken up to the sound of her running feet when she rushed from her small room at the back of the house into our bedroom, and then jumped onto the end of the bed.

Transfer to Melbourne

At the beginning of 1981, the family moved to Melbourne, as I was assigned to organise the SWP branch in that city, my birthplace. Coral, Chantal and myself lived initially with some other comrades in Thornbury, then moving only one suburb away to 6 Adeline Street, Preston.

Chantal attended Thornbury Primary School throughout this period. In hindsight, I realise that she did suffer some disruption in her education because of the several moves we made — not to mention having to make new friends in the different cities we lived in.

On the other hand, I believe she learnt a lot from her experiences in different places, which helped her to become a rounded, sociable and adaptable person later in life. I can only hope she agrees with me on this in retrospect.

Coral had several industrial jobs while we in Melbourne, between 1981 and 1983. One was at Sidney Cooke Nails factory, which eventually closed down as part of the general decline in the Australian manufacturing industry.

I remember she used to have to use hot water to melt the frost off the windscreen of her light-blue Ford Cortina before driving to work on freezing Melbourne winter mornings!

Another job was at Mistral Fans, where she made friends with a Maltese woman co-worker, Maria. Coral and Maria worked together on the line, packing the fans into boxes for dispatch to the shops.

Maria and she worked like Trojans over the summer period one year because they were casuals, and had been promised permanent jobs if they worked hard. Of course, just before Xmas, when the orders for fans had been filled, the company gave them a week's notice instead.

Big mistake! Maria in particular was furious and felt betrayed. She filled the cartons with any old pieces of fan, two engines and no blades, even half bricks!

So they had their revenge on the Mistral management. And they didn't even get found out, as the bosses blamed the night shift for the sabotage in the end!

My work was as organiser of the Melbourne branch of the SWP during those three years in the city of my upbringing. It was an interesting and challenging time, including the key period of our Turn to Industry.

One of my tasks was to sell *Direct Action* outside several industrial plants we were working inside. I well remember selling in the carpark at GM-H in Fishermens Bend, dodging security guards while speaking to workers arriving for the morning shift before 7am.

It was cold as ice in winter there, and the Melbourne weather was generally just as I had remembered it — cold winds with showers, on and off continually during much of the year. Nothing had changed then, although Climate Change may alter that situation.

Our rented house in Preston was really cold in winter. After Coral was sacked from Mistral Fans, she became assistant organiser for the party for a time. She really hated organising, as she pretends to dislike having to talk to people.

In reality, if she has a wine or two, you can't stop her. She loves chatting on to friends, especially women, and loves gossip as well as political discussion.

I remember she finally went "on strike" from the organising job, in the middle of winter, and refused to get out of bed in the morning. I laugh to think of her eyes peering out from under the bedclothes, as icy water dripped into a bucket from a leaking roof in our bedroom in Preston!

Coral tried to get me to play squash at the Preston Squash Courts, but she was too good for me, and I couldn't get used to the quick changes in direction you had to employ in that game. I prefer tennis, but we didn't have much time for playing sport at that time.

I wanted to watch Collingwood when I got the chance. Unfortunately, the dreaded "Colliwobbles" were around at the time, and we lost badly to Richmond in one or two Grand Finals in those years.

I spent a lot of time in the Resistance Centre in Little Lonsdale Street, doing various organising jobs. I remember one occasion when Chantal chased a persistent member of the Spartacist League away with the admonition, "Go away, Hairy Legs!"

One major highlight on the industrial front in the early period in Melbourne was the famous Ford Strike in 1981. The militant Ford workers at Australia's biggest manufacturing plant struck over pay and jobs for many weeks.

One of the issues was the sacking of one of our comrades, Renfrey Clarke, for being too militant and political. The workers, many of them Turkish and Kurdish communists, turned the firehoses on the administration computer centre, and caused havoc with the management of the factory.

They told us they were used to occupying their workplaces back in Turkey, and welding the managers inside their offices just for good measure! A group of these Turkish socialists later affiliated to the SWP for a time, as a result of the solidarity we built with them in that and other industrial actions in Melbourne and Sydney.

I also remember Renfrey singing Australian and international folk songs to the striking Ford workers during long nights around the campfires at the picket lines outside the plant. Those were days of strong union militancy in this country, leading

up to the fall of the Fraser Coalition government — but before the ALP-ACTU Prices and Incomes Accord began the long process of decline of the Australian union movement till today.

In those days, we also made contact with left-wing elements in the Croatian community, principally Jure Lasic. Jure was a real fighter, in every sense of the word.

He rejected the right-wing leadership of the Croatian community, and told us how he got bashed by anti-communist thugs at the Ante Pavelic Club in St Albans for wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt there.

He later cornered a couple of these thugs in the street and gave them a good thumping in retaliation. Jure linked us with some other Croatian socialists and we worked closely with them for a time.

Jure later became an organiser for the BLF in Melbourne. I also remember him dealing with some other right-wing hooligans from National Action one day in Sydney, when they tried to threaten one of our comrades there.

Jure tragically died in a car accident years later. At that time, I was living in Brisbane and unfortunately had had no contact with him for some years.

My last period in Melbourne was the most hectic. In 1983, we ran the biggest election campaign in the SWP's history, with candidates all across the country.

I recall that, under Jim Percy's enthusiastic leadership, the party printed some 50,000 posters and 250,000 election broadsheets to be distributed in a period of a few weeks. In Melbourne, we went into overdrive to put out all this socialist propaganda.

A lot of this organising in Melbourne fell on myself. I remember we had a production line of paste-up teams, with cars pulling up outside the office to be filled with posters and glue, as well as comrades to do the work, often late into the night.

On one occasion, in virtually his first political experience with the party, Sri Lankan comrade Ray Pereira stopped his new car outside the office, and put a bucket full of glue on the back seat — only to see it tip over and ruin his new upholstery.

Jure himself set off with a team of paster-uppers, and promptly crashed his car in the next block!

Other comrades had to dodge the cops as they went out into the suburbs with these masses of posters. One member hid in a tree for hours after being sprung by the police near a city park.

They were the best set of posters the SWP ever published, and sets of a dozen made a wonderful political statement on the election. Because we were forced to travel so widely outside the normal areas for pasting up, many of these posters actually lasted for years on walls and power poles in back streets and lanes in Melbourne.

Also, in early 1983, we organised the Marxist Scholars Conference at Easter in the

University High School (my father's old school). That was a huge operation, featuring Ernest Mandel as special guest speaker.

I remember it was a big challenge, and involved a great deal of publicity and build-up work. It was a big success, and attracted up to 1000 attendees. We gained some good publicity for the SWP and socialism out of it, and the SWP recruited from it as well.

The final huge task I faced in my last months as Melbourne organiser was the move from the Little Lonsdale office to our new headquarters in Anthony Street. The party bought a substantial building, not far from Victoria Markets, and set about renovating it and setting up new offices.

It was three floors, and included a large hall space on the top floor, which included some cinema-style seating. Rumour had it that the space was previously used as a two-up school and possibly illegal casino.

We rented out the ground floor to a motorbike repair shop, and established offices on the first floor and a meeting room on the second floor. It served as the party's base for many years to come.

Return to Sydney

Meanwhile, no sooner had we overseen the move into Anthony Street than I, Coral (and Chantal) were transferred back to Sydney for me to organise Sydney branch of the SWP. I'm sure Coral especially was very pleased to get back to her homeland, and she found the cold weather in Melbourne most unpleasant.

We moved back into the little house in Shepherd Street, and Chantal had to transfer schools again. Fortunately, she made new friends very easily and adapted well.

1983 was a big year in the history of the SWP. We began our big rethink on the turn to industry, and also on our affiliation to the Fourth International.

We reconsidered the political basis of the turn and decided that a one-sided concentration on involvement in basic industry and industrial jobs was unrealistic and had distorted our work and political development.

The international working class had not exploded into action, as we and the US SWP had hoped, and big political movements were occurring elsewhere at the same time. In parallel with this rethinking, the Jack Barnes leadership of the US SWP decided we were renegades and froze us out of their FI faction.

A couple of issues were our refusal to automatically accept their 180 degree reversal

of policy into opposing outright the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and issues over Solidarity in Poland. We were shocked to find they proceeded to carry out a split manoeuvre inside our party as well.

Meanwhile, we were rethinking some of our general Trotskyist sectarianism, and began a turn toward other revolutionary currents internationally. The Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 made us reconsider our mantra that Trotskyism was the fount of all wisdom on world revolutionary politics.

We decided to leave the FI, but instead of the usual letter of denunciation, we issued a polite statement saying we wanted to remain friends, but considered that the FI framework was too limited and narrow, and that we wanted to be an independent, revolutionary socialist party which retained comradely relations with a number of progressive and revolutionary currents in Australia and overseas.

This was followed by a big development in Australian domestic politics: the formation of the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP) in June 1984, which effectively represented the first major left break to the left of the ALP since the CPA in the early 1920s.

We threw ourselves into helping to build the NDP, with the perspective that as a left development from the Labor Party, it represented the best chance for a mass expansion of the progressive movement in Australia in decades.

In parallel with our rethinking on the international arena, we were moving in a more ecumenical direction on domestic politics. Under the main guidance of Jim Percy, the SWP opened up to working with broader forces on the left in general.

Our attempt to become part of the NDP eventually failed, due mainly to sectarian forces inside that party, who rejected our involvement on red-baiting grounds. At a famous conference in April 1985, a faction led by Peter Garrett and others walked out and split the NDP, which never fully recovered.

Prior to this, the Hawke-Keating Labor government signed the ALP-ACTU Prices and Incomes Accord, which supposedly offered “social wage” gains in return for industrial restraint by the unions. In fact, it was a class-collaborationist trap, which tied down the unions and undermined their militancy, in return for very limited social gains, and many losses, from the government.

The Australian union movement has never fully recovered from the straitjacket imposed by the Accord, and has been weakened in its membership and militancy ever since. We urgently need a new upsurge of the working class now to reverse this long-term trend.

However, in 1984, we and the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) began discussions on the basis of general agreement on the dangers of the Accord. This was the second, after the NDP, of our attempts to reach out from the Trotskyist limitations

of our history to seek a broader, radical movement to challenge Australian capitalism and reformism.

At that early stage, not much came of this project. However, it reflected a deeper trend to try to break out of our fundamentally sectarian framework, derived from our origins in the Fourth International, and our battles with other left forces over the years.

During the years 1983 to 1986, I was organiser of the SWP in Sydney. The party had moved into a new four-storey building in Abercrombie Street, Chippendale, only a few blocks from our house at 44 Shepherd Street. The Resistance Bookshop was on the ground floor, with local branch offices on the ground and first floors, together with a meeting room.

The *Direct Action* office was on the second floor, with the SWP national office on the third floor. I was kept very busy with organising work, selling DA and attending meetings and rallies.

The first task was to renovate and paint the new offices, a huge job. I was involved in this, but most of the work was done by Dick Nichols and some other comrades. We soon settled in, and found ourselves campaigning against the Accord with other left forces in politics and the unions.

The formation of the NDP had opened up a whole new arena of political struggle, which intersected with our re-thinking on Australian and international issues. We began to talk to the SPA and others about a united front against the Accord.

This culminated in the very successful Social Rights conference held in Melbourne at Easter 1984, attended by around 700 people. The beginnings of the development of a new class-struggle left wing outside the ALP, and in opposition to the majority of the trade union bureaucracy, opened up other prospects for the growth of the SWP and for broader left unity in Australia.

Latin American solidarity

Around this time, we became more active in Latin American solidarity work, particularly in support of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. The FSLN had come to power in 1979 with the popular overthrow of the US-backed dictator Somoza.

It was our increasing understanding of the Nicaraguan Revolution which contributed to our break with the Fourth International, as we came to appreciate the variety of revolutionary forces at work in the world at that time. The Grenadian Revolution of 1982 (the first revolution in an English-speaking country) had also influenced our broader approach to the complexities of modern revolutions.

We helped to establish CISCAC (Committees in Solidarity with Central America and the Caribbean), which later changed to CISLAC (Committees in Solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean). Coral started to become active in CISCAC, influenced by her personal experience in Latin America, specifically Venezuela in the mid-1970s.

The years 1983 to 1986 in Sydney were very hectic for all of us, in both our political and personal lives. Chantal went on to Camperdown Public School, where she enjoyed her time and made new friends.

Coral worked as a journalist on *Direct Action* for several years at that time. Although her training was as a scientist, and political writing was not her initial preference, she grew into the task and produced some notable articles and interviews for the paper.

In particular, I remember her ongoing work in support of Tim Anderson and the Ananda Marga Three, in prison on trumped up charges from the 1978 Hilton Bombing incident. Also, her coverage of the Croatian militants framed up on terrorism charges in Silverwater jail, as well as the WA gold theft scandal.

Through those years in Sydney, I worked with a number of good comrades, both in Sydney branch and the SWP National Office upstairs, on a whole series of projects. There was an ongoing struggle in the unions over the Accord, and its gradual stifling of militant unionism and democratic organising in the union movement.

We engaged in international solidarity with the Irish republican struggle, the British miners' strikes and the anti-bureaucratic movement in the Soviet bloc. The anti-uranium and anti-nuclear movement internationally and in Australia was also a huge focus in those years.

In this country, massive anti-nuclear marches took place in 1984 and 1985. I remember in Sydney, we distributed thousands of free *DAs* off the back of a truck to the rally of over 100,000 in Hyde Park.

I have always been an enthusiastic seller of the party paper, ever since joining the SWP in 1971. I enjoy the cut and thrust of interaction with the public in selling the socialist press.

One of my specialities in the 1970s and 1980s was the "pub run". On Thursday nights, I would head out into the city of Sydney, starting with the Union Hotel and the Sussex, frequented by unionists from Trades Hall, and do very well going around the tables.

Now that the pubs have been gentrified, pub runs have unfortunately disappeared from our sales roster. Instead we developed special spots such as city stumps, suburban stalls and market sales.

One memorable event of that time was the Direct Action Fete, held to raise money as part of the annual fund drive for the paper. It was held in Foley Park, Glebe,

and featured exotic items like comrade Brett Trenery doing palmistry readings, and comrade Terry Boylan, then head of the reptile pavilion at Taronga Park Zoo, arranging (non-venomous) carpet snake handling for \$5 or so.

Throughout these years, we continued our tradition of contesting elections, both federal and state, and sometimes local council, with our socialist candidates. Our slogan changed in the early 1980s from Labor to Power with Socialist Policies! to Vote Labor! Fight for Socialist Policies!

Later, we supported giving the NDP first preference, then the ALP. In the 1984 federal elections, we worked strongly for the NDP, both as the SWP and as actual members and even candidates for the anti-nuclear party.

After the split and decline in the NDP in 1985, a new opening occurred with the CPA coming out against the Accord. The movement for a New Left Party emerged, with the Brian Aarons leadership of the Communist Party commencing discussions with Jim Percy and other leaders of the SWP, as well as other progressive forces.

I remember the discussions with us were mediated by the well-known writer and Communist Frank Hardy. That was overall a period of reaching out, both by our party and other left forces.

A big NLP conference was held in 1987, but unfortunately the CPA leadership in the end balked at involving the SWP, because they feared the threat of an organised revolutionary-socialist group within the new party. The final disagreement occurred over their reluctance to even use the word “socialist” to describe the new party formation.

Cuba Friendship Brigade

At that time, we were also heavily involved in the ACFS (Australia-Cuba Friendship Society), with myself being an office-bearer in Sydney at one stage. As such, I became co-leader of the January 1987 Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba, with Uruguayan Anibal Arrarte.

Fortunately, he had fluent Spanish to make up for my complete lack of same. We took around 60 people to Cuba, which was a great adventure as it turned out.

We passed through Los Angeles on New Year's Day, 1987, and I well remember the events.

The US immigration official asked where we were going, to which I replied that we were a group of Australians on tour to Mexico. “Have a nice time in MEXICO,” he replied with a wink. They obviously must have known we were going to Cuba, but the Cuban visas were loose-leaf, safely tucked into my inside pocket.

We also took a large box with a Gestetner and copy paper inside, as a gift to the International School on the Isle of Pines, Cuba. I had prepared a reply if we were asked about it. I would say that “Because of the big group, we planned to print a daily newssheet for the tour and needed the printer for that job.”

What an unlikely story! No way they would have believed it, but it was the best I could do in the circumstances. Luckily we didn’t need it as they let us through with all our baggage.

Arriving in Mexico City, we were met by an Australian contact living there, who had hired a couple of buses for us. When we were leaving, a police car chased our bus and ran it off the road, because we hadn’t paid the correct bribe to the right people.

After some money changed hands, we went on our merry way.

The Cuban brigade experience was a great adventure, as well as a challenge. We stayed in the Julio Mellia Camp, and picked oranges and grapefruit during the day — which started very early, at 5am, with a loud playing of Cuba music, followed by a cold shower.

During the evenings, we heard talks from Cuban representatives, and visited Havana a few times for musical events, including a trip to the cabaret.

On the last night of the brigade, we had a special concert from a well-known Cuban band. I had much too much Havana Club rum to drink, and disgraced myself when I had to run a race with ice down the front of my trousers.

We took a trip to a province, where another adventure took place. While we were away at a January 26 celebration of the Cuban Revolution at a barrio, our rooms were broken into and robbed.

It was a nightmare for us and for the Cuban authorities, who were very apologetic. I and some others had American Express cheques stolen, which led to another adventure in Mexico City on the way back home, when we had to go to the Amex office to try to claim replacements.

To my amazement, the office exchanged our cheques without a murmur — despite the fact that we had to admit we had had our cheques stolen in Cuba!

Anyway, we managed to get back to Oz without further mishap.

Move to Brisbane

Immediately upon my return to Sydney, the next major chapter in my life began. We moved to Brisbane, on assignment from the party, to organise the Brisbane party branch.

Although we had no idea at the time, this chapter was to last almost 25 years, and would change our lives completely.

Coral and Chantal had already moved to Brisbane in January 1987, while I was away with the Cuba Brigade. I moved up there soon after arriving back in Sydney.

We settled into the old Queenslander house in front of the SWP-owned party offices at 31 Terrace Street, New Farm. The house was big, with a huge underneath area for storage.

The New Farm offices were in an old brick building, which had been a butchery and a bakery as well. There were some old prints showing the horses and carts which used to frequent the place in the old days.

The meeting room area in the building was enormous, but very run down. The area was great for large meetings and film nights, and we had comfortable lounges, etc., for comrades to relax in.

During 1987, meetings of the New Left Party process continued in Brisbane and elsewhere, and ours were held in the Kurilpa Hall in West End. We used to discuss with members of the CPA and others, but the process came to nothing in the end, and it was the beginning of the end for the Communist Party, which eventually dissolved itself in 1991.

The late 1980s was also a period of severe turmoil in Queensland state politics. The Joh Bjelke-Petersen regime was entering its death throes.

We had arrived in Brisbane at the end of the famous SEQEB (South East Queensland Electricity Board) Dispute, which had split the state into warring class divisions for several years.

Reactionary National Party Premier Joh had suddenly sacked the entire workforce of unionised electricians employed by SEQEB, and employed scabs to cut costs in the power industry.

This led to a huge wave of strikes and pickets, led by a militant Scotsman named Bernie Neville, who later became a member of the Socialist Alliance in the 2000s.

The SEQEB workers gained widespread support from unionists throughout Queensland and around the country. I remember being involved in protests outside the Queensland Tourist Bureau in Sydney in 1985 and 1986, before we moved up to Brisbane.

While the SEQEB workers did not win reinstatement in that period, the SEQEB dispute did play a big role in weakening the Bjelke-Petersen regime, and preparing the ground for his (and the Nationals') eventual fall from power in the state.

Early in 1987, a Brisbane conference of the Union Fight Back movement was held in the Waterside Workers' Hall near the Brisbane River front. The Fight Back

movement involved a coalition of forces, including the SWP, the SPA, and some CPA members, as well as independent union militants around the country.

I remember comrades such as SPA veterans Norm Haub and Ray Ferguson, who played a role in the FB, as well as leading the Brisbane branch of the SPA as we recommenced our unity process with them that year.

The new unity process with the SPA followed the collapse of the New Left Party project following a national conference in Sydney in late 1987. The CPA leadership were basically in a liquidationist trajectory, and failed to grasp the big opportunity that a New Left Party could have been at that crucial stage of Australian politics.

The SPA leadership were divided into two camps about the unity process with ourselves, with one, led by SPA general secretary Peter Symon, remaining basically sectarian Stalinist, and the other, led by veteran Jack McPhillips, more open to a new socialist unity, based on opposition to the class-collaborationist Accord and international solidarity.

During 1988 and into 1989, we developed our joint work with the SPA, including meetings and a famous Greek BBQ or two at the SPA offices in Milton. I became quite friendly with Ray and Norm, and some other SPA comrades during this time.

Meanwhile, Resistance was developing strongly at the University of Queensland. In 1987, Jorge Jorquera was secretary of the UQ Students Representative Council, while another Resistance comrade was treasurer. For that year, and some period after that, Resistance was a major player in student politics in Brisbane.

During the five years or more from 1987, we recruited strongly at UQ, and also at Griffith University. Some of our longstanding party leaders joined the movement during that time, including former Socialist Alliance national co-secretary Susan Price, Carla Gorton, Tony Iltis, Mel Barnes, and Karen Fletcher.

That period in Brisbane was one of the most fruitful periods of growth from the youth movement our tendency has seen in recent decades. The UQ and Griffith were relative hotbeds of radicalism on the national scene.

Meanwhile, on the personal front, I continued as SWP branch organiser for Brisbane, while Coral soon obtained a plum job in 1987 at the Workers' Health Centre, located in the Queensland Trades Hall in South Brisbane. She became heavily involved in exposing cases of industrial poisoning, etc., because of her background in chemistry and biochemistry.

At first, she was well accepted by other staff and union leaders, and became quite well known through her involvement in court cases defending workers suffering effects of asbestos and other toxic materials and industrial processes.

Later, the leaders of the WHC, including anti-SWP individuals in the ALP and

SPA, decided Coral was a potential threat to their political control of the centre, and started to campaign against her. As several of them were planning to resign shortly, they were terrified of leaving the senior figure in the organisation in the hands of an SWP member.

So they launched a horrendous slander campaign against Coral, undermining her to the union officials in the Queensland Council of Unions, in a move to force her out. Eventually, she was removed, with the endorsement of the affiliated unions, in a black day for union democracy in the state.

Coral tends to have a long memory, and has never forgiven those individuals who led the campaign to have her ousted. The WHC in Brisbane suffered from her removal for some time afterwards.

We continued to live in the Queenslander house at the front of the Terrace Street, New Farm office, for several years. Chantal initially attended New Farm State School at the top of the hill nearby.

She made some good friends around that time, some of whom remain close to her to this day.

Darwin holiday

At the end of 1987, we made a big holiday trip to the Northern Territory by bus. The bus journey took a total of 52 hours, from Brisbane to Darwin, with a stopover in Mount Isa (hot as blazes!)

I remember coming to Darwin in the morning on an overcast day in mid-December, with the humidity hanging over us as we emerged exhausted from the bus.

We took a taxi to a caravan park out of the city, and checked in for the night. The woman in the office looked at us in bemusement as we booked a tent site.

That evening, we found out why. Suddenly, the heavens opened, and a tropical rainstorm poured down. Our tent leaked, and I remember lying on a blow-up mattress floating on the water.

We were forced to move into a covered area used for buses, and were then devoured by giant mosquitoes for the rest of the night. Needless to say, next day we moved into a caravan for a couple of days.

We then hired a Holden Drover, a small 4-wheel drive car, and set off for Kakadu. That was an experience too.

The three of us, Coral, Chantal and myself, crammed into a two-person tent for a week or so. Kakadu is brilliant, a wonderland of tropical plants and rock formations,

including historic Aboriginal rock art, many thousands of years old.

Little did I know at that stage that a fourth person was in the process of developing with us, as Coral was already pregnant with our second daughter, Katrina!

Driving in Kakadu was a novel experience in itself. I had never driven a 4-wheel drive before, let alone in deep sand, which came up to the axles and made driving a major challenge. Somehow, we managed it OK.

A highlight of the stay was walking up to Jim Jim Falls, (obviously my favorite place), and swimming in the rock pool up there. We were assured that only freshwater crocodiles lived there, and wouldn't usually bite you!

On the way out of the Kakadu National Park, we found ourselves held up as a queue of vehicles rushing to get out of the park by the closing day, when the rangers locked the gate for the onset of the rainy season when the roads became impassable. By the time we reached the gate, we and a number of others found ourselves locked in as we had missed the deadline.

But no worries. A ute came along with some locals, who simply cut the fence wire and out we all came. This was normal according to the locals.

We then drove to Jabiru, and saw the monstrous Ranger Uranium Mine in the distance. It seemed totally incongruous in that sublime setting of Kakadu.

On the way back to Darwin, we took a boat trip on the Alligator River, and saw many huge salty crocs on the banks. No swimming allowed there!

We returned to Darwin, and visited the sites of the destruction caused by Cyclone Tracy in 1974. Overall, it was an exhausting, but exhilarating, holiday. We took the long bus ride home, seeing the real NT and Queensland outback for the first time, till we arrived back in Brisbane by New Year.

1988 was a big year in Australia. It was the Bicentenary of the Founding of Australia — otherwise known as 200 years since colonisation or invasion by Britain, and the beginning of the genocide of the Aborigines.

The Hawke Labor government had prepared a huge celebration for the Bicentenary. But the Indigenous community saw it as a cause of sorrow, but also a celebration of Aboriginal resistance.

January 26, 1988, was a huge official party, but was also marked by mass rallies and marches by Aboriginal communities and their supporters around the country. In Brisbane, the Aboriginal community mobilised in force on that day, and marched through the streets of the city to Musgrave Park, the traditional meeting place for the local Black community.

It was then that we first got to know our brother and comrade Sam Watson, a descendant of the famous Watson family of Aboriginal leaders in Queensland. Sam

was a true leader of the Black liberation struggle in Queensland and nation-wide. (Sam passed away in 2019.)

He was also a socialist, and later became the national Indigenous spokesperson for Socialist Alliance. He was also an important strategist for building a broad movement to support Aboriginal rights in this country.

I valued Sam as a friend and a comrade in the ongoing struggle for human liberation, as well as his life-long companion Cathy.

Katrina is born

Meanwhile, another important event was brewing in our lives. Coral was preparing to give birth to our second daughter, Katrina, on July 15, 1988. At first, she didn't tell me, but later it became obvious.

She actually eventually did tell me when I was laid up temporarily with a sprained leg tendon, gained playing tennis and stretching too far at the tennis courts at UQ.

Coral was worried that I wouldn't think we could handle another child, given our busy lives in politics etc. But I loved the "Little Devil" from the very first — I was present at the birth itself, and saw the miracle actually happen.

Within a few days, baby Katrina attended her first political function — the CISLAC Fiesta, organised by Coral every year in Brisbane from 1987 to the mid-1990s. In 1988, it was held in the Big Hall of the Queensland Institute of Technology (later University of Technology) at Kevin Grove.

Some 200 people attended, and it was a huge success. In later years, the fiesta was usually held at the Ukrainian Hall in South Brisbane.

Katrina was a joy to me from the start. I have a photo of her at about two years old, clinging to my trouser leg in the house at Terrace Street. When I had to go out the door to attend political meetings, etc., in the office at the back, she would scream her lungs out for minutes.

However, Coral tells me that immediately after I had gone, she would abruptly cease crying, and attend to the much more serious matter of playing with her blocks or Barbie dolls.

I used to care for baby Katrina while Coral was at work in the early days. I remember taking her to the WHC at lunchtimes so that Coral could breast-feed her. An abiding memory of those early days was the bucket in the corner containing her linen nappies, which were caked with white poo (from the breast milk). Later, Katrina began to attend the Lady Foster Child Care Centre at the Ekka (Exhibition Showgrounds),

where she had a great time.

Meanwhile, Chantal was becoming a card-carrying teenager, with all the struggles and issues that process entailed. But she had some very good friends, including Kami, Josie, and twin sisters Lake and Flame, who were her support and confidantes in those years.

On one occasion, in the midst of the turmoil of that period of life, she sat Coral and me down one day and declared: “You’ve ruined my life!” We were crestfallen at first, wondering if it might be true.

But over time, I think we all realised that things weren’t quite that bad. And Chantal pursued her own creative life-path, with all the joys and disappointments that inevitably entails.

At that time, in 1988 to 1989, we were involved in the second unity process with the Socialist Party of Australia. We worked together on several campaigns, including the Union Fight Back campaign.

One incident occurred when we and some SPA comrades decided to drive down to Melbourne for a major national conference of the FB at Easter 1988. We hired a van, and set off through south-western Queensland toward the main inland road, the Newell Highway, to Melbourne.

Just before we got to Goondiwindi, Norm Haub was driving, and I was sitting beside him in the front. I remember saying, “Norm, there’s a T-junction coming up.” He continued talking, and then I yelled, “Slow down, T-junction!”

But Norm just sailed through the junction, and out into the paddock beyond. Luckily, all we suffered was a bent wheel, and so had to wait while a replacement vehicle was brought out from Toowoomba.

It was a close call, nevertheless!

The conference was good, but the process of unity with the SPA hit a catastrophic hurdle in June 1989, when the Chinese Communist Party regime carried out the massacre of pro-democracy students at Tienanmen Square in Beijing. The SPA supported the crackdown, and we of course were adamantly opposed.

The unity process was aborted. It was not possible to continue with such a clearly divergent attitude to this key attack on democratic rights in China.

While we remained friends with many of the SPA comrades in Brisbane, and continued to work with them on a number of issues over the years since, the unification process could not continue.

During those early years in Brisbane, we, and especially Coral, carried out consistent solidarity work with the Latin American revolutions, especially at first Nicaragua, and then El Salvador. Coral maintained the activities of CISLAC, even longer than

committees were active in most other cities.

During the late 1980s, Coral would hold stalls selling Nicaraguan coffee at almost all major political rallies, including International Women's Day, May Day and anti-war events. These stalls were a famous feature of the left movement, and people used to queue up to get their genuine revolutionary Latin American coffee whenever they could.

We also got to know many wonderful Latin American exiles, who were the heart and soul of the solidarity movement in Brisbane. These included the Orellana family, Ovideo, Leonora and the other sisters, Rafael Pacheco and the other El Salvadoran comrades, and the Chilean activists.

These relationships, forged in the solidarity struggle with the revolutionary Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador, have continued to this day. Now, the campaign continues with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, and the solidarity with the other progressive governments and peoples of Latin America.

Later on, in 1994, Coral went with Chantal, and our old friends Robynne Murphy and Marg Gleeson to observe the first El Salvadoran elections that the FMLN were permitted to contest after the end of the civil war in 1992. That was a hugely educational experience for all involved.

The Bicentenary year saw a dispute over the establishment of the South Bank precinct on the Brisbane River, and controversy over use of the site after the official Expo 88 exhibition there was finished. In the end, the site became reasonably well accepted, with its gardens, swimming pool and rainforest area.

Also, in 1988, the end of Joh's regime was occurring, with campaigns over civil liberties and the aftermath of the SEQEB dispute. We threw ourselves into all the political struggles of the time, and saw the party branch grow in Brisbane.

I was the SWP organiser and Maurice Sibelle was the Resistance organiser. Maurice was a ball of energy, and kept the youth organisation continually busy.

But 1989 saw a watershed in international politics with the Tiananmen massacre and the fall of the Soviet bloc. We had taken an optimistic (maybe overly so in retrospect) view of the glasnost and perestroika democratic reforms in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc over the next couple of years shook the whole world socialist movement, including those who took an anti-Stalinist, but supportive, view of the USSR such as ourselves. It was the era of Reagan and Thatcher, and the onset of the neo-liberal capitalist offensive, which has basically continued and intensified up to this day.

In Australia, the neo-liberal assault, unlike the conservative governments in the US and Britain, was led, with some variations, by the Hawke-Keating Labor government.

The Prices and Incomes Accord between the ALP and the ACTU had begun to undermine the historic strength and militancy of the Australian trade union movement.

After the deregistration of the Builders Labourers Federation in 1986, Hawke moved to smash the Pilots Federation strike in 1989. A gradual process of taming and reducing the coverage of the unions was under way. ■

4. Changes in the 1990s

Work in the public service

Again on the personal front, I was beginning to feel the pinch of having had no full time work for nearly 15 years. I began by getting re-registered as a teacher, and taking a few student tutorials over in Mount Gravatt.

But eventually, I decided I needed to go back into the workforce proper, and prepared to apply for teaching jobs in Queensland. Around the same time, I sat the public service exam.

Just as I was considering which schools to apply for, hopefully in Brisbane, a letter came in 1990 offering a position in the Tax Office in the city. It didn't take too much time to decide to take the public service job, as teaching would be highly stressful, I might be sent up-state somewhere in the country, and the tax job would be steady and possibly leave more time for union and political work.

In 1990, I started work at the Tax File Number section of the ATO at the Brisbane office in Adelaide Street. The work was reasonably straightforward, but I soon got involved in union work, as we prepared a campaign for a new industrial agreement.

I remember attending several militant union meetings, and that was the start of the fight to retain an Australian Public Service award, and oppose the development of separate departmental enterprise bargaining agreements.

Around that time, the party started to get involved in green politics, among the early stages of the pre-formation of the Australian Green Party. In Brisbane, we became involved along with Drew Hutton and others in the Rainbow Alliance.

As this was happening, our party was re-thinking our approach to building the socialist movement, and realised the environmental issue was now central to the future of any successful left party.

We decided to change the name of our party from the Socialist Workers Party to the Democratic Socialist Party, in order to underline our deep commitment to the democratic character of socialism, in light of the crisis of international Stalinism.

We also decided to end publication, after 20 years or so, of *Direct Action*, and launch a new paper, *Green Left Weekly*, as an independent, broad-based journal, based on both socialist and environmental principles.

The first issue of *Green Left Weekly* came out in March 1991, just in time for the struggle against the first Gulf War, initiated by the US under President George W Bush, and a western coalition including the Australian Labor government. The coalition attacked Iraq, and soon destroyed Saddam Hussein's army, killing many thousands of Iraqi civilians in the process.

Everything happened at once around that time. We had become heavily involved in the Stop the War Coalition, which met at the Albion Peace Centre, and attracted meetings of up to 100 people at the time.

I found myself as one of the main marshalls, helping to organise several mass rallies and marches, and trying to prevent fights between the police and some anarchists who wanted to attack the US consulate at one stage.

GLW number one was very well received at the rally in March 1991, and we sold hundreds of copies. At the same time, we were successful in winning a hearing among environmentalists organising a new political movement, the prelude to the Greens.

Around that time, I experienced my first and only (so far) arrest by the cops. It wasn't for politics, however, but for drink driving. It was Coral's birthday, March 1991, and we went to a nice restaurant over at St Lucia, near UQ, for dinner.

I told Coral I might be over the limit, but she insisted, since it was her birthday, I had to drive home. So, sure enough, my luck ran out and the police had a drink driving test in the tunnel between the city and the Valley.

I was stopped and blew 0.06, just over the 0.05 alcohol limit. I was arrested and taken to the city watch-house, where I had to sit on a bench for an hour or so before being processed, while Coral and the two girls waited outside.

Eventually I was released. At the court hearing, I was given a minimum sentence of \$100 fine and three months suspended driving licence. I was actually quite relieved that it wasn't worse.

For the next period, I had to call on Maurie to drive me and Katrina to the child-care centre to drop her off and pick her up in the afternoon. Thanks to Maurie for that assistance.

In 1991, we moved out of the Terrace street house, and into number 184 James Street, New Farm, which was only a few blocks away. Coral bought the old Queenslander there, and not too long afterwards she decided to renovate and construct a ground floor home which was separate from the upstairs.

The house was raised up and a whole new dwelling was built downstairs, which

was rented out, firstly to comrades and later to others. Coral did most of the painting of the rooms herself, as well a re-painting upstairs where we lived.

Job at Centrelink

I had been working full time in the ATO, but in 1992 gained a job in the new Department of Social Security call centre in the city. We soon moved into a brand new building on the river-front, with fantastic views of the river, the Kangaroo Point parklands opposite, and the Storey Bridge.

We always figured that it was only a matter of time before the department moved out of this prime location, as it was too good to be true for mere low-level public servants to work in. Meanwhile, we enjoyed the views and did our work for the public.

I was employed in the Employment Services section, which took calls regarding unemployment and the unemployment benefit, which later became Newstart Allowance.

Much of the work was rather routine, but contrary to popular belief, there were very few hostile or abusive calls (maybe people were too reluctant to assert their rights, fearing bureaucratic intimidation!).

I remember over the 15 or so years I worked in DSS (later Centrelink), being struck by the number of people who said they had only called up to apply for the dole as a last resort, after their money (often thousands of dollars in severance and holiday pay, etc) was used up.

I think I was reasonably competent at my job, and received good reports from supervisors over the years. I also soon moved into union activity with the CPSU (Community and Public Sector Union), becoming deputy delegate at the Brisbane call centre site in the early 1990s.

Later, I became one of the full delegates at that workplace, and began to become involved in the internal affairs of the union at a state and national level.

I now feel that being a union delegate was essential for my psychological survival in the call centre over the long term. The work was constant, high pressure and always time-controlled by high-tech mechanisms.

Being a union delegate gave me some more control over my time at work, something political to relate to apart from constant phone calls, and a way of relating to other workers, as well as management, other than actual work.

I was also able to get away with doing more directly political work than I would have been able to without my delegate position. For example, I was able to get around

the workplace and sell at least 20 *Green Lefts* per week in the centre to co-workers.

I was also able to take advantage of union delegate rights under our EBA (Enterprise Bargaining Agreement) to do photocopying, not only of union bulletins, but of other material, such as rally leaflets etc.

It was clear that supervisors and managers kept away from me when I was at the photocopier, as they didn't want to be embarrassed by catching me photocopying unauthorised material. I remember once having a supervisor leave a political rally original leaflet on my desk, without comment, after I had accidentally left it on the photocopier!

In 1992, long-time DSP national secretary, and founder of our socialist tendency Jim Percy, died after a battle with cancer. He was only 43, much too young.

The previous year, Jim and his then partner visited us in Brisbane and stayed with us in New Farm. I remember it was at the time the house was being rebuilt, pipes re-laid etc.

Jim was always in fine spirits. At that time, the cancer was only suspected, not properly diagnosed. It was thought he had irritable bowel syndrome, a result of his love of fine food over many years.

Coral referred Jim to our old friend and comrade Dr John McCarthy, who was working at the Prince Charles Hospital in the Brisbane northern suburbs. John was influential in getting the diagnosis finally made, and the tragic course was set in motion.

In October 1992, I remember we all travelled down to Sydney for Jim's funeral and memorial meeting in the Glebe Town Hall. It was packed with people from around the left, and a moving tribute was paid to Jim from many old friends and comrades.

Maybe, in retrospect, Jim's death had longer term consequences for our party and our movement, as his vision and leadership in the fight to build a bigger, broader socialist party was sorely missed some 15 years later, when his brother John and some other leaders of our party eventually split off in a sectarian direction (more on this later).

On the home front, Chantal was attending Kelvin Grove High School, and had been involved in dance classes at Stones Corner. She was a very talented dancer, and maybe could have moved down that career path as an option, which didn't come to pass as it happened.

Katrina started primary school at New Farm State at the top of the hill, up the road from our home in James Street. She soon developed a strong group of friends, who kept in touch with each other for many years afterwards: Jee, Imogen, Kathleen, Billie, and dear Alice, who has sadly since passed away.

It is amazing how close Katrina's group of friends were. They maintained contact in later years, even though they went to different secondary schools, Katrina to Kelvin

Grove, and most of the others to various private schools. They mainly stayed together through playing soccer with the New Farm United club in later years.

From 1991, the campaign against the Gulf War continued, with rallies and marches, and the anti-war coalition continued to meet after that to oppose sanctions etc. At that time, we pushed ahead with our consolidation of the DSP and *Green Left Weekly* projects.

GLW had great success in boosting sales of our paper, appealing to a broader environmental and socially aware public. I always enjoyed selling the paper in the streets, at uni, and in the suburbs.

I spent much of my spare time outside work attending political events and selling the paper, attempting to spread the socialist message more widely. Our party grew gradually, but not fast enough to break out of the isolation of the left following the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Nevertheless, we carried out some amazing popular campaigns over the years of the 1990s, including struggles over the environment, union rights, opposition to French nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1995 etc.

We ran in the 1990 and 1993 federal elections under the Democratic Socialist Electoral League (DSEL) banner. This allowed us to gain electoral registration and have our party name on the top line of the Senate ballot paper.

In 1993, the Hawke-Keating government was in decline. Keating had taken over as PM from Hawke, and Labor was trailing badly in the polls.

However, the Liberal leader John Hewson made the mistake of campaigning on the introduction of a goods and services tax (GST). Keating was able to win a comeback majority on the back of a big campaign against the regressive GST.

I remember a big rally in King George Square in which Hewson was loudly booed by the crowd over his GST plan. Hewson was before his time, but he perhaps softened up the public for Howard's later backflip in pushing for a GST later on in 1998.

Meanwhile, in state politics, the fall of Joh Bjelke-Petersen was followed by the defeat of the Liberal-National Party regime itself in 1992. Wayne Goss became Labor premier, and proceeded to implement some mild reforms, such as setting up an anti-corruption commission, abolishing Joh's anti-street march laws, and amending some elements of the LNP's anti-union legislation.

We did celebrate the fall of the LNP government, as it ended more than two decades of possibly the most reactionary rule in the country's history. But this was tempered with the knowledge that the ALP would and could only go so far, as the second party of big-business government in Australia.

There was a big controversy later over the trial of Joh on corruption charges. He

was eventually acquitted, but it later turned out that the foreman of the jury was a member of the Young Nationals, who had convinced others not to convict him.

The stench of corruption hung over Queensland politics for some time. The role of the CMC (Crime and Misconduct Commission) was crucial in sending some bent coppers to jail and clearing the air somewhat on the issue.

Green Alliance

Around this time, the Queensland and Australian Greens were established. We had been involved in the Rainbow Coalition for a while, but the new Greens leadership, especially Bob Brown, decided that the socialists should be excluded from the new Green party, maybe because they feared we would push for it to be too left wing, and that we would form a strong faction inside the party.

So, despite our considerable united work with Greens in Queensland and other states, we were banned from being members of the Australian Greens. We had been willing to consider dissolving the DSP and becoming members of the Greens en masse, but were prevented by red-baiting and other bureaucratic means.

Maybe, the course of Australian politics would have been different if we had been able to join the Greens from the start. For one thing, we would have brought a viable and widely-read newspaper, *Green Left Weekly*, to the table.

GLW could have significantly expanded its circulation and influence, and the Greens could have been gifted a functioning weekly publication. To this day, the Greens do not have a regular public newspaper or even journal, only occasional broadsheets.

This is a major weakness of the Green Party in Australia. *Green Left Weekly* had (and still has) the potential to become a mass-circulation newspaper for the eco-socialist movement. I am confident this will still happen some day.

In 1991, we contested the Brisbane City Council elections as part of a broad coalition under the name Green Alliance. We supported Drew Hutton for mayor, and Karen Fletcher ran for the DSP in the seat of Brisbane Central.

Karen received a huge vote, over 5% at least, and couple of the independents got up to 30% in suburban seats. Maurie Sibelle was the co-ordinator of the campaign, and I remember we had a victory party on election night at the Latin American Centre in Fortitude Valley under a big banner reading, "Maurie rules, OK."

That campaign was probably the best united election campaign I have seen in my time in left politics, anywhere in Australia.

Meanwhile, the DSP continued to consolidate and build itself, slowly but surely,

during the 1990s. We developed our environmental work, our union work, our anti-racist work, our women's liberation work and our LGBTIQ work, going into the new century.

Home life and political work were inextricably entwined. Maybe the two girls harboured some resentment at being neglected, although I feel I tried as hard as possible to spend quality time with them, and I always loved them to the max.

Chantal took advantage of Coral's CISLAC solidarity work, she later confessed, by emptying some of the rum from her bottles left over from the cabarets and replacing it partially with tea. She and her teenage friends, such as Kami and Josie, would then scoff the real stuff in secret, without us being any the wiser.

Katrina used to play in the Resistance Centre yard and on the big verandah, with the Resistance members. One day, then Brisbane Resistance organiser Sean Healy asked her, "Katrina, what makes you so smart?" "Because I haven't got a willy," she replied at once. The Res members all cracked up, and Coral of course fully approved of this radical feminist bon mot.

As always, I was heavily involved in the sales and distribution of *Green Left Weekly* outside work hours. Regular sales spots included the City Mall on Friday afternoons, and the West End and Northey Street Organic Markets on the weekends.

One favourite regular spot was Boundary Street, West End, home of the Brisbane progressive crowd. I became quite a recognised local figure there over time.

At one stage during the 1990s, Katrina would insist on coming with me to sit on a chair and play with her dolls, while I was selling near the local newsagency. The "deal" was that in return she would always get an ice-cream, lollies or fizzy drink.

On a later occasion, when she was a fully fledged teenager, wanting to assert herself, she sat us down one day and said: "Mum and Dad, you've got no friends." We looked at each other in dismay.

"Oh no", she added. "Your only friends are my friends' parents!" We wondered for a moment if it was true. Fortunately not quite so, but it took us a few seconds to reflect.

Nevertheless, we did build up close friendships with the parental group of New Farm. Later on, we used to value the gatherings of parents at the New Farm United Soccer Club home games, and the monthly BBQs held at a local park in nearby Newstead.

In the mid-1990s, the family went on a camping holiday to Uluru in the Northern Territory. It was a wonderful trip, and taught us a lot about the Australian outback, and the amazing Aboriginal heritage and rock art that reflects the history of the most ancient civilisation in the world.

One highlight of our political work in the mid-1990s was the Resistance-led campaign against the French nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1995. The campaign was led by our then Brisbane youth organiser Zanny Begg, who managed to mobilise high school walk-outs and rallies which gained considerable mainstream media attention.

Howard comes to power

In 1996, a major change occurred in Australian politics. The Keating Labor government was finally defeated after 13 years by the John Howard-led Liberal National Party Coalition, and a new era of reaction was launched in this country.

Howard immediately moved to attack the union movement, with the passing of the ERA (Employment Relations Act). This legislation mandated enterprise bargaining, and attacked unions' right to organise on the job.

The ACTU called a mass rally in Canberra outside Parliament House, which was led by militants from Port Kembla and elsewhere, and they invaded the parliament building, causing a huge outcry in the right-wing media.

This angry protest did succeed in slowing Howard down a bit, and it was a decade until he was able to escalate the anti-union offensive to the next stage, Work Choices (more on this later).

Rallies were also held in various capital cities, including Brisbane. We organised as best we could to support the union campaign. I did my bit on the job by publicising the actions among my workmates, and seeking support for the campaign.

Also, in 1996, the Howard government moved to privatise the CES (Commonwealth Employment Service), and in 1997 established Centrelink by amalgamating the DSS and other smaller agencies, making the merged organisation more capable of future corporatisation and possibly even privatisation in the future.

The CPSU mounted a national campaign against these attacks, but we were unfortunately unable to stop them. I remember stoppages and rallies outside our call centre in Brisbane as part of this campaign.

Selling off the CES and establishing the Job Network only worsened the organisation of employment services in the country. The CES had its problems, but it was a free, universal facility for jobseekers, whether they were actually currently unemployed or wanting to change jobs.

The Job Network was a concoction of private and not-for-profit organisations, often church-based, linked directly to Centrelink payments, which encouraged rorts among the JN affiliates, whose contracts depended on "measurable results", rather

than quality services. This caused considerable complications in the interaction between the Job Network and Employment Services in Centrelink, where I worked.

Often we would get phone calls from distressed jobseekers, wondering why their Newstart payments had been cancelled, which turned out to be a result of a missed JN appointment, for which they claimed they had never received the letter, etc. Then, restoration of payments could have problems because of the complex intersection of Centrelink and Job Network computer systems, and so on.

All these kinds of things made work at Centrelink a laugh a minute — not. Later, the government enforced even tougher penalties for “customer non-compliance”, such as periods of suspension of benefits, etc. This caused considerable problems for people who were already struggling to survive on meagre payments, which continued to lose real value over time.

Although I did spend some time as an acting small-team leader during the later 1990s, I decided not to apply for a permanent team leader job because the role was gradually changed from being effectively a “leading hand” to being the lowest level of management. I felt that to take on such a job would inevitably result in a conflict of interest, between management and the union.

At a certain point, it was essential to take a clear side and not risk straying into compromise of union and worker principles. While this meant I stayed at a basic level 3 for my whole career in Centrelink, which limited my pay level as well, I was happy to be a union delegate and to represent the great majority of staff in this position.

In Centrelink Call, the majority of staff were women, with family responsibilities as well as career aspirations. And there remained a disparity between a reasonable number of female team leaders and much fewer women at the upper management level.

This continues to be a big issue in all workplaces, especially in the white-collar area where women are often the majority of workers. The issue must be seriously addressed as an urgent priority in Australian industry of all kinds.

As time went by in my work in Centrelink, we began to organise as a party with others to form a rank-and-file caucus to oppose the pro-ALP leadership of the CPSU. At the time, Tim Gooden was ACT secretary of the union, and we began to organise nationally to run against the incumbents, national secretary Wendy Caird and others, to try to create a more militant leadership of the CPSU.

I began to attend state conferences of the CPSU and liaise with other delegates and activists about union work. In June 2000, after several years of build-up, the Members First team ran a full list of candidates against the Caird leadership.

We gained around a third of the vote on average, despite a lowly funded campaign.

I received nearly 35% of the vote for the position of assistant national secretary, a very respectable result.

Meanwhile, the Howard government continued its assault on the public service, with 100,000 job losses, privatisations and outsourcing, and cuts to wages and conditions. It was a constant class war between the government and its workforce throughout my time in the public service.

Nevertheless, I do not regret my life as a Centrelink worker in the least, and feel that I was able to assist people in need, as well as contribute in a small way to the maintenance and development of the main public sector union. That in itself is an achievement to be proud of.

In 1998, one of the great industrial disputes in Australian history broke out — the battle between the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and Patricks stevedoring company. Patricks, under CEO Chris Corrigan, had launched an all-out attack on its waterfront employees, sacking them without notice and calling in scabs and security guards with dogs to prevent the MUA entering its sites.

The assault, designed to break the back of the MUA, one of Australia's most militant unions, was carried out in direct collusion with Howard's industrial relations minister Peter Reith and the federal cabinet. This dispute was immediately recognised by the rest of the union movement as a threat to the whole labour movement and its right to organise.

I began to go out to the MUA community assemblies before work, and sometimes after work or on the weekend. The closest was Camp Unity in Hamilton, while the other one was Camp Solidarity, out at the Port of Brisbane at the mouth of the river.

To get to Camp Solidarity, I had to drive out in the early morning before work, and try to get back in time to catch my bus to work at 8am. It was difficult, but was necessary and well appreciated by the MUA workers.

I got to know MUA organiser Bob Carnegie better at this time, seeing him playing such a leadership role out at the camp. At one stage, he was arrested for lying down on the railway line to block trains from getting out to the Patricks terminal.

I attended a couple of marches from the camp to the terminal gates, and saw Rugby League great Wally Lewis out there in solidarity with the workers. In the end, the workers won the battle, but still lost many jobs when they returned to work, and casualisation was advanced by the waterfront companies in the aftermath.

Death of my father Ian

In December 1998, my father Ian died. I had received a phone call from his partner Estelle to say that he had taken very ill and was in the hospital at Caloundra, on the Sunshine Coast. We rushed up there that evening and were able to speak to him briefly, but he passed away that evening.

Ian had developed motor neuron disease in the previous years, and had gradually lost the ability to eat and control his movements. We had visited him and Estelle a number of times as his condition worsened, and were not surprised, but saddened, when he eventually left us.

Prior to this time, we had managed to drive up to their flat in Caloundra, close to Kings Beach, many times over previous years. I was a good little holiday for us and the girls, spending time swimming and walking.

The block of flats they lived in had a pool in front, so we could swim often without having to walk down to the beach. It was a relaxing chance to take a break from work and political activities when we visited for a weekend.

Estelle could be rather stern in her manner at times, but in retrospect I appreciate her looking after Ian in his later years. I realise now more than ever that you need support as life goes on, with all its trials and tribulations.

After Ian's death, we arranged a funeral at the crematorium in Caloundra. And relatives, including ours and Estelle's, were coming from the south to attend.

An amazing event occurred on the way to Caloundra. I had my little blue Mazda in front of Coral's Ford Cortina, stopped at the traffic lights on the highway outside the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

Then, as if sent by the gods or Ian's ghost, an old man failed to brake his car behind Coral and crashed into the back of hers, shunting it into me. The boot of my car was stove in, making it unable to be opened.

I was perhaps in shock, but I panicked, pleading with the tow-truck man to prise open my boot so I could get the notes for my speech for Ian's funeral service. In the end, we got them and then had to wait for a replacement hire van to arrive.

Meanwhile, Bob's daughter Sam was shaken up in the accident, and taken directly into the hospital by paramedics who happened to be in an ambulance waiting with us at the lights outside the hospital!

Eventually, we all managed to get to Caloundra, and the funeral went off OK in the end. Speakers included myself, Fiona, Bob and Fran, Estelle's oldest daughter Tess, and a rep from the local RSL!

Later, we were able to collect insurance from the old man's company, both for the

loss of my car, which was a write-off, and for a whiplash injury to myself and Coral. It seemed as if the whole event was a final gift to us from Ian from above somewhere!

In July 2000, Judith Wright, one of Australia's greatest poets and my godmother, died. I remember Judith as a somewhat stern, but humanitarian, person, who once gave me some encouragement for my own modest poetic efforts as a teenager.

I had written a poem called "Bushfire" for the Mentone Grammar School magazine in the early 1960s, and my dear grandma Clare had sent it in to the *Age*, where to my amazement it was published in the *Lit Supp*, and I received £25 in payment!

I think Clare also sent it to Judith, who wrote to me and said I should keep up the good work, or something to that effect. Needless to say, my poetic career did not last beyond school days, unfortunately.

After Judith died, I wrote an obituary for *GLW*, July 12, 2000, which recounted her life and work, and concluded: "Judith Wright will be remembered both as a wonderful poet and a major progressive figure in the life of 20th century Australia."

Asia adventure 2000

In 2000, Coral and I went on our biggest and best holiday to that date: a 15-week trip around Asia, from September to December, to coincide with my long-service leave after 10 years in the public service, plus a couple of weeks' annual leave.

We did it just as the Sydney Olympics was occurring, escaping the hype and hysteria of the great patriotic games. It was a wonderful experience, which remains with me to this day.

We flew by Ansett to Hong Kong, where we stayed for some days, and saw around the islands, as well as meeting members of the Hong Kong Fourth International group and other leftists, such as the famous Long Hair. It was great to walk around HK island, and to see the wonderful museum on the mainland.

We stayed at the YWCA, visited the parks and gardens, and travelled on the excellent metro train system.

Then, upon advice from a friendly travel agent, we took a fast ferry to Shenzhen, entering the People's Republic of China there, instead of a more expensive flight directly to Beijing. From Shenzhen, we flew Southern China Airways to Beijing as an internal flight.

Our *Lonely Planet* guide was our bible. When we arrived in Beijing, we immediately found a cheap hotel near the centre of the city, went out for a walk to see: an international beer festival, complete with Fosters Lager stall, Heineken, and all the others! We

tasted a few ales that night.

Walking around Beijing was an experience. It is huge, and the blocks are enormous. We walked for miles, saw the infamous Tienanmen Square, and the Forbidden City (the Mao Mausoleum was closed for renovations).

Near the square we found a little café with pictures of Mao, Lenin, Stalin and Enver Hoxha all over the walls. Chinese tourists from the provinces insisted on taking photos of us with their families in the square.

We also took a bus trip to see the Great Wall, at a place called Badaling. It was a great sight, reminding us of the terrible cost in human lives for such an achievement, and a big job to climb up the mountain.

Next, we went by train to Tientsin, the port city for Beijing. There we met a friend from Brisbane, who was working in childcare there. She helped us find a nice hotel, just near the Chou En Lai Museum.

When we entered the room, I soon turned on the TV, and heard the sound come up before the picture: “Hopocate takes the ball and runs up, before passing to ...” I thought, “Well, blow me down, it’s Wests Tigers playing in the Sydney Rugby League competition, broadcast all the way to Tientsin, China!”

Talk about cultural globalisation!

Nearby, there was a wonderful lake, with islands and boats. And we visited the Chou En Lai Museum, which had a display of the history of the Revolution and Chou’s part in it and the subsequent period.

That night, we went to a fabulous restaurant to taste a lovely Peking Duck dish!

Next, we took the train to Shanghai, China’s most modern and globalised city. We stayed at a hostel, and took a bus to see the historic Bund, where the West had established its colonial base in 19th century China. There were huge buildings which had housed banks, large European trading companies and shipping agents.

Now, there were huge skyscrapers with the names of Japanese and US companies emblazoned on them — symbols of capitalist restoration in China.

Nevertheless, we were later able to find a small building in the back streets, where the early Communist Party headquarters had been situated. There, Mao and other leaders had met in secret under the oppression of the Kuo Min Tang in the 1920s.

We also saw old parts of the city, including temples, which had not yet been demolished for new developments. No doubt, many of these old buildings have since been destroyed.

We took a day trip to the beautiful, ancient city of Hangzhou, capital of the Water Cities. There we went on a boat ride on the famous West Lake to visit various walled temples and castles, etc.

It was a beautiful experience of a past era, still unspoilt by modern development — till now.

We then returned to Shanghai, and took another train to Guilin, the famous town among the karsts, or parabolic mountains beside the river. In the town, we were amazed to find a Hard Rock Café and other Western icons. But the food at the local market was cheap and fabulous.

We took a ferry ride along the main river, and saw the incredible karsts rising out of the riversides. These are some of the symbolic scenes of China around the world.

After that, we took a bus trip to the Vietnamese border, and crossed over into the mountainous region of northern Vietnam. From there, it was a very uncomfortable ride in a mini-bus, with my legs cramped and my backside in agony.

Nevertheless, we eventually arrived in Hanoi, and met up with our comrade and friend from Brisbane, Allen Jennings, and his Nicaraguan partner, Juana. After a pleasant cup of herbal tea, we settled into their wonderful, narrow, three-storey house in the diplomatic quarter.

(Apparently, because the French authorities used to charge considerable land tax based on the size of the block, the Vietnamese used to build high, on as small a slice of land as they could.)

We spent some days in historic Hanoi. It is actually surprising that so much of the famous old city is still standing, as we had thought it might have been bombed out by the US during the Vietnam War (known as the American War in Vietnam itself.)

We walked around the city, visited the old area with its streets named after crafts, such as Silk Street, Pottery Street, and so on, saw the Hoan Kiem Lake, the Museum of Ethnology, the Temple of Literature, and the Hoa Lo Prison Museum, where the French authorities used to hold and torture independence fighters.

A highlight was the visit to the tomb and mausoleum for the father of Vietnamese independence, Ho Chi Minh. We had to queue in line for some time to file past Ho's monument.

But, it was noticeable overall, that you saw a lot more of the history of the revolution in Vietnam than in China. There were still many more banners with pictures of Uncle Ho, and revolutionary slogans on them, than you ever saw of Mao in China — where the revolution seems like an ancient dream, not a current reality.

After a wonderful stay in Hanoi, and thanks to Allen and family for the wonderful hospitality and kindness, we set off by train to Vinh, the next major city on the journey south.

The train trip south from Hanoi to Vinh was beautiful, with the line following not far from the coast all the way. We love travelling by train, better than any other form

of transport, so you can see the scenery, in relative comfort, all the way.

We alighted at Vinh station, and made our way to a hostel for the night. Next day, we caught a bus inland to the border with Laos, crossed over and took another bus to the capital, Vientiane.

The trip took most of the day, and we arrived in the old French city of Vientiane and found a hotel to stay. We spent some time looking around the town, including the busy Morning Markets, a museum of the independence war and the US bombing campaign, Buddhist temples and the lovely banks of the Mekong River.

The French influence showed in the delicious croissants, gateaux and coffee at little cafes. A highlight was to sit under an umbrella at a bar on the banks of the Mekong, drinking Lao Beer, and looking out over the vast river (you could just see the other side in Thailand).

Then, we arranged to travel in a truck to the ancient, mountain city (UNESCO heritage-listed) of Luang Prabang. Sitting in the front seat next to the driver on that trip was a real adventure.

The road wound around up into the mountains, with big drops on the side down to valleys far below. We had also been warned that guerrillas (or bandits) were a potential problem on that route, but we didn't see any.

Eventually, we arrived in picturesque Luang Prabang, and found a cheap hotel to stay for a few days. We walked around the town, saw the Royal Palace Museum, some large Buddhist temples, and watched a dragon boat rowing competition.

At night, we climbed the Phu Si hill with its monuments on top, and a wonderful view of the city and the mountains at sunset. That visit was a highlight of our whole trip.

After that, we took another truck on the winding road back to Vientiane, past an adventure park for foreign tourists. Next trip was the long bus journey back to Vietnam.

The first stage was a trip which partly followed the route of the Mekong to the southern Laotian town of Savannakhet. There we had to wait at the bus station for an evening bus to the Vietnamese border.

That was an adventure. First, we were a bit slow in the rush to the bus when it eventually arrived that night. We found ourselves lying on a pile of boxes filled with tins of food at the back, a very uncomfortable spot.

Then we embarked on the most arduous bus trip I have ever experienced in my life. It was overnight, in total darkness, with the bus weaving around and through deep puddles, and the driver's young assistant having to get out regularly to check the depth of the holes with a stick, to see if the bus could go through.

Lucky for us it was pitch black, because we were also no doubt veering toward the

edge of mountain precipices at the same time. We didn't get a wink of sleep that night, and were relieved to arrive at the Vietnam border next morning.

That wasn't all. After waiting at the Vietnamese border post for some time, the bus set off again past a Cuban-built bridge, only to be stopped by a Vietnamese military jeep. We had to wait in frustration as the soldiers robbed the unfortunate owner of the bus of many cartons of food. We felt bad but couldn't say anything for fear of retribution.

Eventually, the bus arrived in the town of Dong Ha, where the driver abruptly dropped us off. He was fuming about his mistreatment by the Vietnamese authorities.

As soon as we arrived, a young motorbike rider named Jimmy accosted us and offered to take us on a bike tour of the De-Militarised Zone (DMZ) the next day. He showed us a cheap hotel, and said he would pick us up next morning, with his brother.

So, next day, Coral and I climbed onto the pillion seats of Jimmy and his brother's bikes and set off northward through the DMZ. We passed a house with a broken down army tank in the yard, used as a bungalow, with washing hanging from the cannon barrel.

We stopped at an area of wasteland in the DMZ, where we walked through a former minefield, and were warned not to stray off the path as there were unexploded mines and shells everywhere.

We ended up at the village of Vinh Loc, where we were handed over to the guidance of a young woman to take us through the underground tunnels which the NLF used during the war to hide from US bombing and shelling, including settling whole families for years away from harm.

We were told that many women and children had not seen sunlight for years, as they could only emerge onto the beach at the other end during the night. NLF soldiers did venture out to fight the Saigon regime and the Americans.

Inside the tunnels were rooms for sleeping, kitchens, a hospital and even a room for showing films. When we came out onto the beach, we saw an island offshore which apparently had been a base for the North during the campaign.

One remarkable thing was the fact that Jimmy and his brother came from families which had supported the South during the war, while their business partner, the young woman, was from a family who fought for the liberation forces! That's the complex reality of contemporary Vietnam.

Then, we continued our bike tour to visit the huge North Vietnamese cemetery inside the DMZ, where thousands of Northern troops killed in the war were buried. That was a sobering experience.

After that, we were taken to a restaurant in the countryside, where we had a

delicious lunch of local Vietnamese food. We returned to Dong Ha, and thanked our young guides for the day's adventures.

Historic city of Hue

Next on the list was Hue, the ancient historic capital of central Vietnam. We took a mini-bus there, and stayed in a nice hotel in the central district.

Hue was heavily affected during the Vietnam War, with the battle for Hue during the 1968 Tet Offensive a major contributor. Nevertheless, many of the ancient buildings survive or have been rebuilt in recent years.

We took a boat trip along the Perfume River, which divides the ancient city, to the Imperial Citadel, the royal tombs, the Forbidden Purple city, and the ancient fortress. At night, we walked around the parks and ate at a food market.

Then, it was on to Hoi An, the best-preserved historic international city in Vietnam. Hoi An was largely not hit during the war, and its multinational architecture of Vietnamese houses, Chinese temples and Japanese shops, including the enclosed Japanese bridge, has been retained.

Hoi An is now one of the tourist meccas of Vietnam. Inland from there is the ancient Cham civilisation My Son sanctuary, which we visited by bus one day. It was one of the three historic temple cities we saw on our Asian sojourn — My Son, Angkor Wat (Cambodia) and Borobudur (Indonesia).

While not as grand as the others, it is a truly remarkable site. Unfortunately, it did suffer from US bombing during the war, and you can still see bullet holes in the monuments.

However, the story goes that an archaeologist succeeded in petitioning US President Richard Nixon to halt the bombing before the ancient citadel was destroyed. Thus, it has been partially preserved for posterity.

The Champa city at My Son was a Hindu civilisation, with reliefs of the Hindu gods and goddesses all around. While, when we visited, it was in part covered by jungle, I suspect it would now be recovered as a major tourist attraction in Vietnam.

Our next trip was a long and rather perilous journey by mini-bus down Highway One to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). This was another amazing bus trip.

Highway One is basically two lanes of paved road, but there are five lanes of traffic: one lane each way for cars and trucks; one lane each way on the side for bicycles; one lane each way on the edges for pedestrians; and one lane in the middle for mad mini-bus drivers who just sit on the centre line with their horn blaring, driving at high speed

for hundreds of kilometres. That was us, from Hoi An to Saigon.

It was an experience. It was a white-knuckle ride the whole way, but the scenery was beautiful, and the sea was pleasant.

We did manage to stop for a swim at one point, at a seaside village near Da Nang.

Driving into Ho Chi Minh City, you see a lot of industrial development in process, till you reach the centre. There, we soon found a small hotel to stay, and began to explore the city.

We visited the War Remnants Museum, a graphic series of displays of the history of the American War, including fetuses of babies who died in stillbirth from Agent Orange poisoning, and even a picture of an anti-war rally in Australia.

We also saw the government building with the famous North Vietnamese tank which broke through the gates at the end of the war. The old French colonial buildings are still there, including museums and hotels, but the city was clearly suffering from pollution and unplanned development from the new era.

In all, the struggle between socialism and capitalism seemed to be continuing in Vietnam, compared to China where capitalism appears to have won decisively.

To end our stay in Vietnam, we took an early morning bus to the Cambodian border, and then crossed over into a country which was still obviously affected by the American War, even 25 years after it officially ended in 1975.

The long, slow bus ride from the border to the capital Phnom Penh ended at the central bus terminal, where we were picked up by Helen Jarvis, our longstanding friend and comrade. We stayed with Helen and Allen Myers at their house right on the banks of the Mekong, with amazing views of the majestic river.

We stayed in a bungalow beside the house, which apparently had water lapping against it when the river level was high. From the house, we took trips into Phnom Penh to see the historic sights, including the Buddhist temples, and the Central Markets.

One evening we had dinner at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, overlooking the river, and saw the regular elephants' parade along the esplanade. The city was just beginning to recover from the effects of the war, despite many problems, which continue to this day.

Finally, we set off on a river boat up the Ton Le Sap River, which joins the Mekong at Phnom Penh. This river is unique, because when the Mekong is in full flood, the Ton Le Sap can't enter, and turns around to flow back upstream to the huge Ton Le Sap Lake above.

Our river boat eventually arrived at the town of Siem Reap, at the northern edge of the Ton Le Sap Lake. There we disembarked and found a small hostel to stay.

Next day, we took a mini-bus to the famous Angkor Wat monument, in the

middle of the jungle. That was a fabulous experience. It is really the remains of a historic city, including religious temples and castles from the Angkor civilisation.

It is a huge site, surrounded by a moat, with lakes in the distance. On the walls of the main temple, there are numerous bas reliefs of Hindu gods and goddesses, including accounts of the Brahmaputra.

In the jungle, there are other amazing temples such as the Bayon. We climbed one complex to see the lakes and other buildings over a wide area.

Finally, we managed to catch a taxi back to the Siem Reap township. Next day, we took a motorboat past the floating villages of the Ton Le Sap to the city of Battambang, on the southern shore.

From Battambang, we took one of the most painful and tortuous road trips I have ever experienced, along the “road” to the Thai border. There really was no road, only a series of giant holes, connected by a track, so that our truck had to wind along, driving way out into the surrounding fields to make progress.

Eventually, we arrived at the border with Thailand, where the next stage of our amazing adventure began. The first incident occurred at the Thai border post, where Coral accidentally brushed the robe of a Buddhist monk.

He started yelling and gesticulating at her, as it is “unclean” for a woman to touch a monk apparently. Well, Coral let him know his attitude was sexist and ridiculous. It was great to watch.

After this, we caught a bus to the capital Bangkok, which took quite a few hours. The countryside scenery was beautiful, with rice paddyfields and mountains in the distance.

We arrived in the evening, and glided through the streets till we reached the central area, where we disembarked and found our way to a rather seedy hotel, to a tiny room which had a bed so close to the ceiling you could hardly sit up. An amusing incident was that a young Dutch traveller had given us directions, but asked if we really wanted to go to that type of hotel “at our age”.

We spent a few days in Bangkok, and toured the Golden Temple, which has enough gold to feed all the people of Thailand, but can’t be touched. We also took a trip on the river to a nice hotel, where we treated ourselves to an expensive lunch and drinks.

Then we saw the area where pro-democracy rallies had been held. To end our stay on mainland Asia, we went to the Bangkok airport and boarded a flight to our next destination — the Philippines.

Next stop the Philippines

We landed at Manila Airport, and met up with Reihana Mohideen and Sonny Melencio, our old friends and comrades. Reihana had been an SWP leader from back in the 1980s in Melbourne, and Sonny was a leader of the socialist movement in the Philippines, and a former NPA militant.

We stayed with them in a pleasant house in the suburbs, which they shared with another couple. From there we visited various sites, including the Malacanang Palace where they had a museum of historical artefacts, including a large collection of Imelda Marcos's shoes.

We also visited and attended meetings of the Socialist Party, which they were helping to organise. Another trip was to the University of the Philippines, where we met Professor Francisco Nemenzo.

We also attended a large rally and march by workers against multinational companies and the government's policies. Everywhere we went, the smell of the diesel oil from the Jeepneys was very strong, and the overall pollution in Manila was very heavy.

At one point, we were able to go to the road outside the military barracks where the original revolt against President Ferdinand Marcos occurred in 1986. Coral was there at the time, and observed the Yellow people's revolution which overthrew the dictator Marcos.

For a break, we went on a car trip outside Manila to a country house which belonged to a party friend of Reihana and Sonny.

Finally, we went on a big bus trip to a city in the mountains, where we stayed in a convent! They looked after us very well there, but we had to pay a fair bit for the privilege.

All in all, the visit to the Philippines was most interesting, and gave us a further insight into life in the Asian Third World.

Next stop was Indonesia. We arrived at Jakarta Airport, and took a taxi into the city centre. There we found a hostel in the tourist area, with a mosque right nearby.

We soon met up with the comrades of the PRD (People's Democratic Party), whom we had been collaborating with over a number of years. We went to their offices in a suburb, and met a group of members, including some who lived in the office.

We did quite a bit of sightseeing around the city, including Merdeka Square, and the old Dutch port area (where I remember we got a bout of food poisoning from some street food).

One adventure was a visit to the island of Sumatra with then-PRD leader Dita Sari. There we attended a demonstration by students against police repression.

We were just settling into a rather opulent hotel for a rest (provided by a wealthy donor to the PRD), when we were rushed away and back to Jakarta via a car ferry to avoid a raid by the secret police seeking to question us.

Then, we set off by bus for a trip through Java to the east, and eventually Bali. First stop was Bandung, where we visited an interesting museum. We then took a mini-bus trip up into the mountains to see an active volcano.

There, we were able to paddle in warm springs, with sulphur fumes everywhere. I remember Coral trying to convince our young guide of the dangers of his work, with the likely long-term bad effects of breathing in sulphur fumes all the time.

Then, we took a train trip to the south coast, where we stopped at a beach resort town. Coral got upset at being ripped off at one point, and I recall having to plead with her to get into the rickshaw as we made our way to the town from the train station.

We were able to have a swim at the beach, and then boarded another bus to the central city of Jogjakarta, a historical capital. There we visited the twin religious monuments of Borobodur and Prambanan, one Buddhist and the other Hindu.

They are magnificent sites, and look out over the landscape from the great height. We climbed both monuments, and listened to a musical event at one of them (the first I think).

We also attended a shadow puppet play at a theatre in the city. We stayed with Rebecca Meckelburg at her house in the suburbs, catching the bus into the city centre to see the sights.

After Jogjakarta, we caught the train again to the central city of Solo, where we met up with the local branch of the PRD. They showed us some of the sites of political struggle in the area.

Then we re-boarded the train to the northern port city of Surabaya, where we stayed only briefly before taking another train to a town in the east, from where we took a mini-bus to the mountainous region ringed with volcanoes. We stayed in a small hotel, and before dawn took another mini-bus in the pitch dark up a winding road to a vantage point to see the sun rise over magnificent Mt Bromo.

Mt Bromo is an active volcano, still smoking continually. It was incredible to see the sun come up over a live volcano and walk in the area beside it.

Next was a bus ride all the way to the east coast of Java and on to an overnight ferry to Bali. The bus then continued on to the capital Denpasar, from where we caught another mini-bus to the beachside town of Kuta.

We were delighted to find a cheap hostel in a back street or “gang”, where they

served tea and bananas for breakfast.

We flew from Kuta Airport to the airport at Dili, which was like a country airport in Australia. We were lucky to be able to stay with Mick Bull and Vanessa, who were working in East Timor as a builder and a UN teacher respectively.

They had a nice small house in the suburbs, and we were able to see all over Dili, visit the cemetery where a massacre by Indonesian troops against the local population occurred in 1990, go swimming at a couple of lovely beaches, and take a bus trip up into the mountains inland of the capital.

We also took a car trip into the countryside where we were welcomed by the local people at a village which had been a strong base for Fretilin during the independence war. After a fascinating week in the newly independent East Timor, in which we saw the ruined buildings in Dili still not recovered from Indonesian repression, we flew back to Bali.

In Kuta, we had a great week of rest to finish our wonderful holiday. We went to Kuta beach, drank beer and ate lovely food, and bought mementoes in the local shops and markets. We also took a trip to Ubud, to see the wonderful Hindu temples and the monkey reserve.

In Denpasar, we viewed a museum which included the unknown history of the island, in particular the mass murder of the Bali royal family faced with the guns of the Dutch colonisers in 1910.

We also visited a couple of beach resorts, and a few seafood cafes and bars. All in all, it was a great way to end our great Asian adventure. In late November 2000, we flew out of Kuta airport back to Sydney and then on home to Brisbane.

In February 2001, the Peter Beattie-led ALP won a landslide victory in the Queensland state elections. Coral ran as a candidate for the DSP in the seat of Brisbane Central, and won 1.4% of the vote.

We campaigned strongly, and afterwards urged the Labor government to act on its promises and to introduce progressive legislation, as it had overwhelming number in the unicameral Queensland parliament.

I was campaign manager for our election campaign, and wrote articles for GLW and items for the local papers about our campaign. ■

5. Socialist Alliance Founded

A major event in left politics in 2001 was the foundation of the Socialist Alliance, initially as a coalition of seven Australian socialist organisations, most notably the DSP and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO). We began with high hopes of consolidating a unified socialist party over time, but others regarded SA as more of a united electoral front, rather than a potential new, united socialist party organisation.

However, we began our work in Brisbane in a cooperative and non-sectarian fashion, with myself working closely with Mark Gillespie from ISO to co-ordinate SA in that city.

In the early part of the year, the movement to blockade the Brisbane Stock Exchange, under the title M1 (May 1), began to develop (a similar process was occurring nationwide, as a follow-up to the worldwide anti-capitalist globalisation movement). Even the Queensland Council of Unions called a special affiliates' meeting to discuss support for M1, while individual unions expressed their solidarity.

We involved ourselves heavily in the organisation of M1, and mobilised on the day for the rally outside the Stock Exchange near the river. While we were not able to totally close down the exchange for the day, we did disrupt its operations, and the police had to turn up in force to control the crowd.

Around this time, Resistance Books published my pamphlet, *The Red North*, about the history of radical politics in Queensland, based on a talk I had given at a socialist educational conference at the start of the year. I felt it was important to try to publicise the progressive history of the state, given its poor image as the home of Joh and Pauline Hanson.

I was very happy to see it published, and pleased with Simon Butler's favorable review in *Green Left Weekly* in June. While it was not based on original research, I felt it did give an overview to a general progressive audience of an important topic.

In June, I attended the Asia Pacific People's Solidarity Conference in Jakarta, along with a number of other DSP comrades. I presented a paper at the conference on Australian politics.

Before the conference, which was held outside the city, was even finished, police invaded and arrested the foreign participants, including myself. We were taken in police vans to the central Jakarta police station.

Removal of the foreigners left the way open for right-wing militias armed with machetes to attack the PRD comrades and others attending the conference, and they had to flee to save themselves. We were held for a day or two in a meeting room at the station, until pressure from diplomatic missions forced the police to release us.

I remember a sleepless night in the room, trying unsuccessfully to catch some shut-eye on a chair. Meanwhile, family and comrades at home held a demonstration outside the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs to demand action to obtain our release.

Eventually, we were released and able to go back to the conference centre to collect our belongings from our rooms. We then spent some days meeting the PRD comrades, and even visited the branch in Bandung where they had also faced state repression.

All this had occurred after the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998, but police intervention in political life was still very strong. Finally, we flew home, and I vividly remember being welcomed back to Brisbane airport by my family, and even being interviewed by a friendly journalist from the local newspaper.

In August 2001, a shameful event occurred which will forever be a stain on the history of Australia: the Tampa Affair. The Howard government used an act of solidarity by the Norwegian captain of the MS Tampa to save a boatload of refugees attempting to reach Australia from Indonesia to stage a blatant piece of piracy on the high seas, forcibly stopping the ship and turning it around, all in an attempt to save the government's hide in the upcoming federal elections.

This was one of the iconic evil, and cynical, acts by an Australian government in our long history of racist, anti-humanitarian official politics. It provoked a new rise in the refugee rights movement in this country, and we involved ourselves in helping to organise the protests.

This event was followed by the defining tragedy of the early 21st century, which has deeply affected world politics ever since: 9/11. The crashing of planes into the Twin Towers in New York by lunatic Al Queda terrorists was seized upon by US President George W. Bush and his allies such as John Howard and Tony Blair to create a state of "war on terror," which has dominated international relations ever since.

I remember waking up during that night, and hearing a report on the radio of a major incident in New York. We turned on the TV and saw the pictures of the planes smashing into the skyscrapers, and we all had a sense of foreboding that this would mean big trouble for the world.

Sure enough, Bush soon launched the invasion of Afghanistan, and began preparing for the second Iraq War. And we soon re-launched the Stop the War Coalition in Brisbane, as the anti-war movement began to grow around the country, and internationally.

Meanwhile, in Australia, Howard moved quickly to take advantage of the Tampa Affair and the heightened “national security crisis” around 9/11, to call a federal election for November 2001. Until that time, he had been trailing badly in the polls to the ALP, but soon retook the lead on the back of a scare campaign.

The Socialist Alliance, contesting its first federal election, ran on a platform opposed to the invasion of Afghanistan, and urging funding for essential public and social services, not for war. It also focused on supporting refugee rights.

I, along with the other DSP comrades in Brisbane, was heavily involved in the SA election campaign. Although we achieved modest votes, the campaign did have an impact in broadcasting the socialist message to a wider audience.

Somewhere around this time, we suffered a mysterious fire in the Brisbane Terrace Street buildings. It started in a storage area in a garage, and burnt some of the big building adjacent to the shed.

Unfortunately, it affected the work of some artists who were renting the space from us, and ruined their work. They had to move out, and the building was a mess.

Luckily, the fire brigade came quickly from Fortitude Valley and put out the blaze. They and we strongly suspected arson, and suspicion fell on supporters of the One Nation party, although nothing could ever be proved.

All this accelerated the DSP's decision to sell the Terrace Street property, and move to another place, nearer to the city. The buildings were later demolished and a block of somewhat environmentally sustainable apartments built on the site.

It was a big job to move all our party gear out. A lot was thrown out or sold off in a big garage sale.

Coral and I meanwhile spent almost six months looking at other possible buildings for the party to buy with the proceeds of the sale. But we couldn't find anything suitable at an acceptable price in the Valley or West End, although we did inspect quite a few places.

So, the Brisbane DSP moved into a new building in Fortitude Valley, via a temporary stay in a space near the Prisoners Legal Service in WE, arranged by comrade Karen Fletcher. This stay was only short-term, till we found the FV place, which was above a café.

We stayed in this office for a couple of years, until we found a better place nearby, right on the main street, opposite a park. It was downstairs, and comprised two

adjacent rooms, one for an office and one for a meeting room.

This office, at 74B Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, continued as our Brisbane branch office for years to come, and I have vivid memories of all the forums, meetings, film nights and conferences held there over the 10 years or so I worked from there.

In early 2002, the refugee rights movement began to grow stronger, and organising efforts for rallies and meetings stepped up nationally and in Brisbane. The anti-war movement also grew as the US and allied preparations for an invasion of Iraq became more apparent.

My involvement in CPSU work also increased as the Howard government's attacks on the public sector and the union movement in general also accelerated. The CPSU was organising to oppose cuts in wages and workplace conditions in Centrelink and across the public service.

According to a report in *GLW* at the time, I spoke at an SA-sponsored forum on the future of the unions and the ALP on May 18, at which I said: "More than 100 years of ALP control of the trade unions is enough.

"Why should workers continue to donate vast amounts of their hard-earned money to a political party that supports privatisation and job cuts? Workers are starting to demand an alternative. It's time for unions to reconsider their affiliation to the ALP."

In July 2002, Katrina and I jointly wrote a review for *Green Left Weekly* of the film *Bend It Like Beckham*, under the title "Women Can Do Anything." The film celebrates the struggles of two young British women, teenagers, to play and advance in the male-dominated world of football (soccer).

"This film is excellent because it encourages young women to play soccer!" The joint effort expressed both Katrina's growing feminist views, and her involvement in playing soccer for the New Farm United football club.

My heart operation

Around the middle of 2002, I began to notice pains in my arms when I walked up the steep hill along the Brisbane River on my way home from the call centre in the afternoons. I eventually went to see an old doctor at the Brunswick Medical Centre, and he referred me to have a stress test for my heart.

The test came up positive for angina, and a serious heart problem. I was sent on to a cardiologist at Prince Charles Hospital, who arranged an angiogram, which revealed blockages in four arteries to the heart.

I was put on a waiting list for a heart by-pass operation at Prince Charles. Meanwhile, the doctor ordered that I not be able to take the overseas trip Coral had planned for the whole family to tour South America and Europe that year.

She had to move quickly to postpone the trip for 12 months, which was the maximum delay allowed under the conditions of the existing air tickets, which had already been bought.

Meanwhile, I continued at work, and waited for a date to be booked for the heart operation. Then, in November 2002, I suddenly took a turn while giving an Introduction to Marxism class at the office one night.

Another comrade called an ambulance, and I was transported to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, where they decided I needed to have an urgent heart op. Another ambulance took me to Prince Charles Hospital, where I was admitted.

The operation needed to occur within a couple of days. Coral and the girls visited me there, as I prepared myself for the big day.

I remember the night before, the surgeon saw me and got me to sign a release form, which authorised the operation, recognising that these ops involved a 5% chance of serious side-effects or not coming out alive.

As if that wasn't alarming enough, the nurse asked me if would like to see a video of the proposed open-heart operation, so I could understand what was involved. She said there were several variations, of differing degrees of realism about the whole gruesome procedure.

I said I might as well see the whole truth, as it would make no difference to the outcome anyway. So I watched the X-rated version, complete with the electric saw cutting the rib cage, and the blood and guts of the op itself.

After that shock, I was fortunate that the film about Hurricane Carter, the US Black boxer who won the world championship, but was discriminated against in various ways, was being shown on TV. That absorbing film effectively saved my bacon by keeping my mind fully occupied until I fell asleep that night.

Next morning, I was woken up early, and soon found myself being wheeled into the operating theatre. Shortly afterwards, I went under the anaesthetic and can't remember any more about it all.

Apparently, the operation went for about five hours, but I was asleep for some time after that. Next morning, I woke up gradually, feeling totally zonked, to see that I was in the ICU with tubes coming out everywhere, and electronic gauges all over the place.

Soon, a kindly nurse asked me, "Good morning, Jim. Would you like a cup of tea?"

I was amazed, thinking there was no way I could drink or eat anything at that stage.

But, jokingly, I replied, in a drowsy voice, “Yes, please. Milk and two, thanks.”

To my astonishment, she brought the cup and helped me to drink it.

After some time in the ICU, I was moved into a cardiac recovery ward, along with half a dozen other men, mostly old codgers. I, at 56, was one of the younger ones there.

I was visited by Coral and the girls, plus other comrades and workmates, even my boss from the call centre, Mick Spillane. Everyone was very supportive and comforting, which was very “heartening”, so to speak. I also received many cards from well-wishers.

I wasn’t feeling too much pain, because I was on constant pain relief via a tube. I also had to lift myself up by pulling on a rope attached to the foot of the bed, so that I didn’t force the chest wound open, but rather pushed it closed when I pulled myself up in bed.

I must have been in the ward for about a week or so, and came to like the company, even the food. (Coral liked the hospital desserts, so I joked that she always made sure she visited at lunch and dinner times to join in the repast!)

The old codgers in the ward had different conditions, including arrhythmia of the heart, etc. One elderly Italian man told the story that when he first suffered symptoms of his heart condition, he decided to return home to Italy to have the treatment done.

At the Italian hospital, the doctor asked him where he lived. He said Brisbane, Australia. And they replied, “What are you doing here? The Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane is one of the most famous in the world for heart operations.”

So he came back to Brisbane for the op. PCH is, in fact, well known for its heart operations.

I later wrote an article for *Green Left Weekly*, dated January 15, 2003, entitled: “Public health: A small piece of socialism.” In it, I noted that I had recently undertaken a coronary by-pass procedure at PCH.

“The entire experience has convinced me more strongly than ever that we need to defend and extend the public health system of Australia ... The skills, dedication and care provided by the medical and support staff at Prince Charles Hospital were an inspiration to me. Professionalism and patient care are the watchwords of all the staff at the hospital, from the surgeons and other doctors, to the nurses, wardspeople and other support staff.”

“The Prince Charles Hospital ‘has the largest cardiac unit in Australia and one of the largest in the world,’” according to a hospital brochure. “Public hospitals such as Prince Charles deserve our full support.”

John McCarthy quoted from this article when he retired from the hospital some

years later, an event which Coral and I attended. Tragically, John, who was living on the Sunshine Coast, died from Hepatitis C, which was contracted from a needle-stick operation on the job in the 1970s. He is a true martyr to the cause of public health in this country.

Meanwhile, after I returned home from hospital in late November 2002, I felt unwell a short time later, and was re-admitted to hospital for a week or so. I'm not sure to this day what it was, but it may have been the after effects of the operation and particularly the anaesthetic, which upset my stomach and my head for years afterwards.

I began to suffer acid stomach, and also light-headedness, periodically, over quite a few years after the operation. Among my many medications from then on, was included omeprazole for the acid stomach, as well as statins for cholestrol control, blood thinners, and later a pill to lower blood pressure.

Despite all this, I managed to return to work at the call centre in January 2003, although from then on I arranged to work part time to reduce the stress brought on by my heart operation and its aftermath. I continued to experience problems from my acid stomach during 2003 and beyond, unfortunately.

During January-February 2003, the build-up to the planned US and allied invasion of Iraq continued, highlighted by the infamous "weapons of mass destruction" charade at the UN. Popular opposition to the invasion mounted, as widespread rejection of any new war increased.

This culminated in the famous anti-war rallies and marches of February 2003 — the largest, coordinated international peace mobilisation in history, involving many millions of people around the world.

We were involved in the committee in Brisbane which organised the march, which grew out of the Rally for Peace, one of the longest standing anti-war coalitions in Australia. The key organisers of the Brisbane committee were ALP Senator George Georges and long-time peace campaigner Joan Shears.

I had been involved in the Rally for Peace committee ever since arriving in Brisbane in 1987, and respected George's political work considerably. He was one of the few left Labor parliamentarians who consistently adopted progressive stands on peace and other issues over several decades.

The February 2003 anti-Iraq War rally in Brisbane was swelled to more than 50,000 by involvement of the churches and many NGOs on a massive scale. We in the DSP and SA had a couple of stalls at the rally in the Botanical Gardens and sold many hundreds of *GLWs*, plus T-shirts, badges etc wholesale.

I remember selling a lot of *Green Lefts* myself, and enjoying the experience of distributing to such a large crowd of receptive people. It is one of the joys of my life to

sell our socialist paper to a lot of people, many of whom are new to our ideas.

The family goes to Latin America

In the middle of the year, our family, including myself, Coral, Chantal and Katrina, embarked on our delayed around the world trip via South America. First stop was Auckland, New Zealand, where we stayed with a Kiwi comrade, and then looked around a little before continuing on to Santiago, Chile.

Already, in NZ, I was feeling the effects of my acid stomach, and this worsened in Chile. I ended up going to a doctor in Santiago, and getting some more medication for the problem.

We still managed to see a number of the sights in Santiago before continuing on to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I remember the saga of the missing towel, as Katrina had left her towel back in Australia, so we had to hunt around and go to a big emporium to get a replacement (something similar happened in Santiago over a comb).

Next stop was Caracas, Venezuela, home of the Bolivarian Revolution under the leadership of President Hugo Chavez. We were picked up at the airport by Coral's old friend Margot, who took us to a hotel in the middle-class suburb of Altamira.

We spent about a week in Caracas, and I just remember going to some nice restaurants and visiting the Central University of Venezuela, where Coral used to work in the 1970s, and where her old friends Marcelo and Itala continued to be employed in the Institute of Experimental Medicine.

I remember having great trouble sleeping in our hotel room because of the acid stomach problem. Coral took me to a doctor at a clinic nearby, and the kind woman doctor there made me a list of foods which should be avoided as much as possible, as they tended to accentuate stomach upsets. I kept that list for many years afterwards: it included lemons, chocolate, tomatoes, etc.

The two girls had a pleasant room on the side of the hotel facing a beautiful park, where we walked some times. On this first trip, we didn't have much contact with the political struggle going on between the Chavistas and the oligarchy.

From Caracas, we flew to Lima, Peru, where we settled in to the Hotel Espana, an old place with amazing paintings and sculptures all over, near the centre of the city.

I still had problems with my stomach, and took Stilnox as a sleeping pill. This was a double-edged sword, as it had a frightening effect of your mind racing until you finally fell into a deep sleep.

Stilnox was later banned as a drug used by athletes to help them sleep, as it had

other negative side effects, including inducing paranoia and other mental problems. Soon, I stopped using the medication, which was very fortunate for me in the long run.

Partly because of my health difficulties, we decided that I and Katrina would stay in Lima, while Coral and Chantal flew off to the ancient Inca city of Cuzco in the high Andes, and on to the citadel of Machu Picchu.

Katrina and I spent our time visiting various sites in and around Lima. We saw the infamous Museum of the Inquisition, where there were exhibits showing torture instruments including drawing and quartering.

We also saw the nearby San Francisco Monastery, where there were hundreds of skeletons in the crypt of people buried for religious sanctity in past centuries. We also visited an ancient Indigenous city outside Lima on the coast, which belonged to a separate tribe to the dominant Incas.

We were taken around by a woman driver whom Coral had contacted via the hotel staff. While we were travelling around Lima, we saw a march of striking workers near the city centre.

I wrote an article for *GLW* from Lima in June 2003 about the strike wave which threatened to bring down the right-wing Peruvian government. Coral and I wrote a follow-up article in early July noting the massive protest movement which was rocking the political system to its core.

Katrina and I visited the Lima Zoo, where we saw all kinds of exotic native animals, such as llamas and alpacas, monkeys, snakes, and others. Katrina really loved seeing the unusual animals, I remember.

Finally, after a few days, Coral and Chantal returned from the Andes, after having a great time walking through Machu Picchu and other sites. Soon, we flew out on our next leg to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

Landing at Rio airport, we took a taxi into town, and finally found a great little hotel near the seaside, with the help of our driver. The most notable aspect of this place was the incredible breakfasts that were laid on by the woman hostess, including cereals, eggs, juice, coffee and empanadas.

We toured the wonderful city of Rio, including a trip up the mountain to see the statue of Christ the Redeemer on the cog train, where we bought some great souvenirs. We also visited the colourful suburb of Santa Teresa, with its winding streets, unusual architecture, and great cafes.

Finally, we had to do some serious shopping to find some Havaiana thongs for Katrina to give to her friends back home. Coral managed to do a deal with one shop to buy about 20 pairs for a cut price, which we had to lug around for the rest of the trip! However, they did eventually give Katrina some real cred when she got home.

Next, we took a long flight from Rio to London, where we stayed with Coral's old friend Joan, husband Alan, and their children in the northern city suburbs. They had a great house with three storeys, and plenty of room for visitors.

It was quite warm, being July, and we were surprised to see the English boys basking in the sun in Hyde Park with their shirts off. First signs of global warming!

We wandered all around London via the Tube, visiting museums, various famous historic sites, Parliament House and the Thames. We also visited Linda Britter, our friend from Brisbane, who was tragically dying of cancer.

Linda had returned to Britain, after living in Brisbane for some years. She was an activist with Coral in CISLAC.

She lived in a nice flat in inner London, and we spent a pleasant day with her. We were very upset to hear later that she had ended her own life some time afterwards.

During our time in Britain, I wrote an article for *Green Left* about the Scottish Socialist Party's youth conference, which had ambitious plans for expansion following the success of the SSP in recent Scottish elections.

We next flew to Paris, where we found our way to an artist's loft being rented by Tess and her sons Gabriel and Ned. One thing I recall is that we had had trouble finding the address, and had had to ask for directions from some shopkeepers in the suburb.

I was forced to delve back into the deep realms of my memory to find the French words necessary, and was surprised to find that my school French came back to me in part. It just shows that under pressure, you can often remember things you thought you had long forgotten.

We spent some time touring Paris, including meeting up with our old friend Burgi, Dave Holmes' ex-partner, who travelled all the way from Vienna to meet up with us. We took a trip on the Seine by river ferry, past the Eiffel Tower and with a stop at the Notre Dame Cathedral and the Louvre art gallery.

Burgi stayed in a hotel with tiny rooms, like rail sleeping car bunkrooms. Unfortunately, after that meeting in Paris, we have rather lost touch with Burgi, who became ill later.

We also visited Montmartre, the famous home of the Paris Commune of 1871, but were amazed to find little sign of any official commemoration there. However, we did have a delicious, if rather expensive, dinner of French cuisine at an upmarket restaurant in Montmartre that night.

Chantal left by train to travel to Spain from Paris at that stage, to meet up with her then boyfriend Nastasi in Barcelona. The rest of us then flew out of France to London, and then back to Australia, via Singapore.

By that time, my stomach had settled down somewhat, and I had much less trouble with it after we reached the European leg of our grand world tour. It was a great experience for Katrina, then 15, and a card-carrying teenager, and also for Coral and me.

Remembering history

In October 2003, Peter Boyle wrote an article for *GLW* about the protests against the visit of LBJ to Australia in 1966. He interviewed me about my experiences in the Melbourne University student movement at that time.

“For Jim McIlroy, another one of the anti-war protesters in Melbourne when LBJ came to town, it was the beginning of a life of radical activism,” Boyle wrote.

“Today, McIlroy still hits the streets for demos and he will be protesting US President George Bush’s visit later this month. As the Brisbane branch secretary of the Democratic Socialist Party (one of the affiliates of the Socialist Alliance), he remains an unrepentant organiser for radical activism.”

In late October, I myself wrote an obituary for Labor left leader and icon of the Australian anti-Vietnam War Moratorium movement Dr Jim Cairns, who had just died at the age of 89. He became a cabinet minister in the Whitlam Labor government from 1972.

“Jim Cairns exemplifies the dilemma of the Labor left over the years — even the best mass movement leader becomes entangled in the contradictions of the ALP parliamentary machine, unless they are prepared to directly challenge the pro-capitalist framework of Labor politics.

“Cairns was as good as it gets in the ALP. There has been no one since, in the ALP leadership, who has come even close to his national stature, being willing to lead extra-parliamentary protest actions against the pro-war policy of the Australian ruling class,” I wrote.

In November 2003, Resistance Books published my second pamphlet, *Australia’s First Socialists*. At a launch of the pamphlet in Brisbane, I said, “As socialists, we ignore our own history at our peril.

“Contrary to a widespread myth, Australia has a rich history of class struggle, both in terms of ideas and action — up to, and including, the most militant, even violent, class conflict.

“In order to win the Australian working class and the oppressed to a socialist perspective in the long run, we need to better understand the historical experiences

which have shaped our unique labour movement, and which continue to influence it today,” I told the book launch audience.

In a review of the pamphlet in *Green Left* that month, John Nebauer wrote: “Most people should know about the rich heritage of the early Australian socialist movement. McIlroy should be commended for making it accessible.”

In January 2004, Queensland Labor Premier Peter Beattie called a snap state election for February 7, in an ultimately successful bid to catch the LNP opposition on the hop. He won convincingly in the end.

The Socialist Alliance ran three candidates, in the seats of Brisbane Central, South Brisbane and Inala. I was campaign manager for the first two seats.

SA called a “Challenge to Beattie” rally outside his electorate office in Spring Hill on February 4 to call on the premier “to make some significant changes in this state”.

Coral, who was our candidate for Brisbane Central, issued a call “to demand full compensation for stolen Indigenous wages, more money for health and education, an end to privatisation and outsourcing, and expansion of public housing and the decriminalisation of abortion.” Needless to say, after he won the election, Beattie refused to take up the challenge, and the political struggle continued.

Following the election, around Easter, Coral set off for Venezuela again to teach a course at the UCV on behalf of Margot in the pharmacy department for three months or so. Meanwhile, Katrina had managed to sprain her ankle playing soccer, and was hobbling around while Coral was away.

I remember she complained bitterly about my cooking, or lack of, skills. It is true that our diet consisted mainly of pasta and bolognaise sauce, as well as boiled vegetables, but I’m sure it was reasonably healthy.

Moreover, I used to have to drive her to the physio in Newstead regularly while she recuperated from her injury. Somehow we both managed to survive the ordeal.

However, ever since then, none of my family — Coral, Chantal or Katrina — will normally allow me to cook at home, except in emergency circumstances. So, I generally stick to my speciality, washing the dishes.

I have always found that to be somewhat therapeutic, so long as it doesn’t interfere with watching TV in the evening. That’s why I am not altogether unhappy about advertising on television, even on SBS!

It gives you a short break to do more of the dishes, in small bursts. The problem with the ABC is that you don’t get that break to complete the dishwashing, which is a nuisance, I find.

So, around May 2004, we came up with a plan to take a holiday and also bring the whole family together for a catch-up, in New Zealand. I had always wanted to take a

proper holiday in NZ, as although I have visited Kiwiland a couple of times for socialist conferences, I had never actually visited some of the iconic scenery in that beautiful south land.

Thus, we arranged to have a grand catch-up in Auckland, with Katrina and I flying in from Australia, Coral returning from Caracas, and Chantal coming back from her long overseas travels to meet up with us in NZ.

Chantal had gone overseas for several years in the early 2000s, travelling to Latin America, Spain, England and other parts of Europe. She stayed in both London and in Dublin for some time, working in the hospitality and tourism fields.

After leaving Kelvin Grove High School in the mid-1990s, she moved out of our home at James Street, New Farm, as soon as she turned 18, and into flats in Fortitude Valley and then at Clayfield, near Breakfast Creek.

She took a year-long diploma course in art at the Northern TAFE at Hamilton, which stimulated her desire for a career in the art field. This later took the direction of curating and arts administration.

She started work in the travel industry at STA Travel, and moved to Melbourne later to work there. She later worked for Intrepid travel.

During her trip overseas, she renewed a deep interest in Latin America, staying in Chile for a while, and meeting a boyfriend, Nastasi, from Spain, whom she lived with for a time.

She also worked in a hotel in Ireland for a time, and then at Harrods in London. She stayed with Coral's old friend Joan while she was there.

So, in 2004, Katrina and I landed at Auckland airport, took the bus into the centre of the city, and checked into the City Hotel near the harbour. That night, both Coral and Chantal arrived, after flying in from opposite sides of the globe.

We were so happy to be together again after not seeing each other for some time. From there, we spent a few days in Auckland, seeing the sights, including the huge tower in the middle of the city, the Maori museum and visiting a historic seaside suburb on a lovely ferry trip.

After that, we hired a car and set off for Rotorua, where we were booked into a hotel overlooking the famous boiling mud springs. There is a story in that as well.

Coral and I had managed to get free accommodation over the years by attending time-share consultations at the Gold Coast and in Brisbane. We got a couple of days in a motel in Noosa, a ride on the paddle-wheel steamer on the Brisbane River, as well as the stay at Rotorua.

We spent a couple of days in a nice hotel room, visiting the tourist spots, including Coral and Chantal taking a hot mud bath. Then we set off again in the hire car to the

Waitomo Glow Worm Caves on the central-northern coast, which were fabulous.

While Coral and I took a more sedate flat boat through the caves, the two girls went black-water rafting through the caverns. Then we drove across the North Island to the east coast, and along to several other attractive beaches and headlands, on the way back to Auckland.

Finally, we drove to the northern section of the island, visiting the famous region of Waitangi, site of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Maori people and the British colonial regime in New Zealand. Then we returned to Auckland, and after meeting up with some of the NZ socialist comrades, flew back to Australia.

During the rest of 2004, I continued to work at the Centrelink Call Centre in Brisbane, and do my CPSU union duties on the job. The Howard government was preparing for its Work Choices all-out assault on unions and working people at that time.

In July 2004, I wrote a review for *Green Left Weekly* of Carole Ferrier and Raymond Evans' book, *Radical Brisbane*, which recounted the "unruly" history of the labour movement, Aboriginal struggles and women's rights in that city. "Radical Brisbane is a revelation in bringing to public attention so many hidden areas of social unrest and struggle over a century and a half of the history of Queensland's capital," I wrote.

In December, the third of my pamphlets on labour history was published by Resistance Books, *The Origins of the ALP: A Marxist Analysis*. Chris Atkinson reviewed it for *GLW*, observing, "Jim McIlroy's new pamphlet is ... a must read for anyone wanting to understand the origins of Labor's headlong rush further to the right."

"This vacuum, [created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the CPA], makes the task of building a genuine working-class alternative — a socialist party — to eventually challenge the Labor Party for leadership of the workers' movement more urgent than ever."

In late 2004, John Howard called another federal election, and managed to win again over an ALP opposition still struggling to re-organise itself and find a key issue to use against the Coalition government. That came later with the threat of Work Choices and a general tiredness with the deteriorating Howard regime.

SA ran a strong campaign around the country. In Queensland, we mounted a major Senate campaign, led by the all-Aboriginal ticket of Sam Watson and Nicole Clevens.

We also ran in a couple of House seats. I was one of the main campaign directors for this election mobilisation.

November 2004 saw the tragic killing of Cameron Doomadgee (Mulrunji) on Palm Island by police sergeant Chris Hurley. The uprising by Aboriginal islanders

which followed was also reflected in big marches in Brisbane and Townsville.

We were heavily involved in supporting the march in Brisbane, which was organised by Murri leaders such as our comrade Sam Watson. This upsurge marked a new rise in the campaign against Aboriginal deaths in custody in Queensland and nationally.

SA members, including myself, were active in the solidarity campaign in support of justice for Mulrunji. In Sydney another campaign exploded in protest at the police killing of young Koori TJ Hickey in Redfern.

In December 2004, I went down to Ballarat, Victoria, for the 150th anniversary celebrations of the historic Eureka Stockade, which was a turning point in the development of the democratic and labour movement in Australia. I stayed with our former Brisbane comrades Erin and Brett, who now lived in Ballarat.

I attended a rally and party marking the event, as well as visiting the Eureka Museum, near where the battle for the stockade between insurgent gold miners and colonial troops took place in December 1854. I really enjoyed being part of this notable commemoration of an important milestone in our country's labour history.

Around Christmas 2004 occurred the disaster of the Asian Tsunami, which killed hundreds of thousands of people in Aceh, Indonesia, and in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. At the time, we were at our family Xmas gathering at Guerrilla Bay, near Batemans Bay, in southern NSW.

I remember being transfixed by the TV coverage of the tragedy, and watching the horizon when we swam at the lovely beach near where we were staying. The house was owned by Fiona's partner Tony, and we quite regularly visited there for an extended family dinner and holiday over the Xmas period.

The tsunami was a wake-up call that tragedy can strike anywhere, anytime, especially in the Third World. It made us more aware of how fortunate we were to be living in the "Lucky Country", somewhat shielded from the harshest cruelties of the world. Relatively speaking, and not for everyone, of course.

2005: My final year at Centrelink Call

2005 turned out to be my final year of work at Centrelink. I was still affected now and again by my acid stomach problems, including burping and light-headedness.

So, I further reduced my hours at work, by arranging an alternating four-day and then three-day week, which still allowed for a 30-plus hours a fortnight roster, based on a nine-hour working day.

This meant that my overall pay was not cut too much, and yet I had three days

extra a fortnight for political work. This was pretty much an ideal compromise arrangement, personally and politically.

Several years before this, the call centre had moved from beside the Brisbane River to a purpose-built building in South Brisbane, not far from South Bank. This provided a reasonable environment for the workplace, and an atmosphere of comradeship for the hard-working staff and a rewarding challenge for my union activities — despite the growing pressure placed on the Centrelink workers by the neoliberal Coalition government and the department bosses.

Overall, I value my experience at the call centre, epitomising as it does the modern workplace, with its advanced technology and high-tech management pressures. The staff at Centrelink deserve proper recognition as “essential public sector workers”, who do their best under restrictive conditions to serve the community.

Invasion Day, January 26, 2005, in Brisbane, featured the key issue of Black deaths in custody. Thousands marched from Roma Street Forum in the city to Musgrave Park, demanding justice for Mulrunji and other victims of state repression.

Sam Watson was a key organiser of Invasion Day in Brisbane every year, and we played a back-up role in supporting him where appropriate. Sam was a vital link between the Aboriginal rights struggle and the socialist movement.

DSP Brisbane organiser Paul Benedek and I did a revealing interview with Sam for *GLW* in January, headed, “Indigenous community will fight to the ‘nth degree’.” In it, Sam spoke about the Doomadgee case, the Stolen Wages campaign, and the need to bring down the Howard government and replace it with a government committed to Aboriginal rights and social justice.

In May, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the reactionary National Party former premier, who presided over a corrupt, anti-democratic regime for decades in Queensland, finally died after a long illness. I wrote an article in *Green Left* reporting on the campaign by the No State Funeral for Joh Committee.

I quoted socialist academic Gary MacLennan noting in the lead-up to Joh’s death that, “There should certainly be a day of mourning when Petersen finally breathes his last, but it should not be for the corrupt old bigot, but for those who were crushed under his regime.”

In June, I wrote an article for *GLW* concerning the anti-war protests against Operation Talisman Sabre, the largest military exercise ever held in Australia. It involved forces from Australia, the US and other nations in a mock “invasion” of Shoalwater Bay, central Queensland, near Rockhampton.

Protesters gathered there every year, and rallies were also held in Brisbane. We supported these rallies whenever they were held.

Also in later June, Queensland unions mobilised for a mass rally of members to oppose the Howard government's new anti-union laws, "the first shot in a long campaign to defeat the laws and to oust the Howard government", the Electrical Trade Union's Dick Williams told *Green Left*.

"The Defend Our Unions Committee, a network of rank-and-file unionists, is also campaigning to build the rally and for a further rally against the industrial laws in August, with cross-union meetings of delegates and a commitment to support any unionists victimised under the new legislation," I wrote.

Meanwhile, an industrial struggle was emerging by the CPSU against a Centrelink management-proposed enterprise agreement, which would "represent a serious loss of conditions for the agency's staff," I wrote in the June 29, 2005, *Green Left Weekly*.

I was involved in the campaign as a workplace delegate in Brisbane Call, and tried to mobilise members in the centre, as well as involve them in the broader union campaign against Howard's new anti-union laws.

Another smaller campaign around that time involved an occupation of a site at Maleny, in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, in opposition to plans for a Woolworths store there, which threatened the habitat of an endangered local platypus population. Coral and I visited Maleny a couple of times, in support of the protests, and also to sell *GLW* to the environmentally conscious residents of the town.

Our work in building the Socialist Alliance as a broad coalition of socialist forces continued. In August 2005, we held a public forum in the Brisbane Activist Centre in Fortitude Valley featuring prominent Marxist historian and SA member Humphrey McQueen.

"While we're fighting the IR laws, socialists need to never lose sight of the goal of replacing the capitalist system entirely," he told the audience. "Socialism needs a moral appeal as well as an economic analysis. It's not enough just to rebuild the unions. They need to be more democratic, with more rank-and-file participation," McQueen said.

We also were involved in the refugee rights campaign and the ongoing anti-Iraq War struggle. I attended and helped to build a number of rallies and public meetings on these issues throughout the 2000s.

In September-October, 2005, I was involved in my last industrial campaign in Centrelink, with the CPSU holding rolling stop-work meetings around the country to demand an improved enterprise bargaining agreement, including an improved wage offer, better conditions and defence of union organising rights.

I was involved as a CPSU delegate in Brisbane Call in mobilising members to support the strike action, and to endorse the union's campaign. This was the last on-the-job campaign I was involved in before my eventual retirement from work in early

2006.

For some time, Coral and I had been planning a major trip to Venezuela, essentially to coincide with my 60th birthday, and retirement from paid work. The DSP's solidarity work with the Bolivarian Revolution was stepping up at the time, and we were active in the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN).

This also aligned with Katrina finishing high school in 2005, and preparing to start university the following year. I remember being quite impressed with the school's process of combining late secondary education with the commencement of training in post-school courses, outlined when we attended Katrina's graduation night at Kelvin Grove High School.

She had already decided some years before that she was determined to become a film-maker as a career. She enrolled in the media degree at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), which was situated in the suburb around KGHS.

I essentially finished up work at the end of 2005, and prepared for the big trip. We were planning to live in Caracas for a year, and experience the revolutionary process there first hand.

It was a bit of a hard thing for Katrina in retrospect to leave her alone in the house for a whole year, even though she had her friends Alice and Gen there with her. She did get sick later on, and probably felt a bit alone without her parents there for the first time.

However, she seemed to survive the year all right, and was more independent minded for it. I know Coral was worried about her during our stay away, but it turned out OK in the end.

2006: Our year in Venezuela

So, we set out flying from Brisbane to Sydney in early January 2006, and then by Lan Chile to Auckland on the first leg of our grand adventure. After a short stopover in NZ, we went on to Santiago, Chile, and spent a short time there, before flying on to Caracas, via Lima.

I remember we arrived at night, and took a taxi the long way around over the mountains to the city, because a major road bridge on the way between La Guaira Airport and Caracas had collapsed.

We alighted in Sabana Grande, and were taken from there to the Frente Francisco de Miranda youth organisation compound in Catia, a working-class western suburb of Caracas. There, we were welcomed and settled down, along with a group of other

Australians, on mattresses in their offices.

I soon got sick in the stomach, together with a couple of others, and was taken to a medical clinic, where we received professional treatment, completely free. That was my introduction to the Venezuelan Revolution.

Our first major event was the World Social Forum held in Caracas from January 24-29, 2006. The Caracas WSF attracted some 100,000 people from many countries, especially from Latin America, to around 2000 meetings and forums on topics related to anti-imperialist struggle and socialism.

The highlight was a huge public meeting addressed by President Hugo Chavez on January 27 in the Polihedro Stadium. Chavez proclaimed, “socialism or death”. “If we do not change the world now, there may be no 22nd century for humanity,” he told the wildly cheering crowd.

The WSF was a tumultuous mixture of events, reflecting the popular upsurge sweeping Venezuela, as well as some of its contradictions. Another feature was a march of some 20,000 activists on the first day to launch the social forum, expressing the great spirit of solidarity and internationalism pervading the week of activities.

Immediately after the forum, we joined around a dozen other Australians in our first AVSN solidarity brigade, led by Fred Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke. The brigade visited social missions, and Chavista neighbourhoods such as Barrio Enero 21, the traditional heartland of the Bolivarian Revolution.

On February 4, we joined with an estimated two million Chavistas, dressed in their red T-shirts, in a long march from an outer suburb to the centre of the city, to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the failed coup by Chavez and other military officers aimed at overthrowing the neo-liberal, right-wing government of the Fourth Republic.

After the brigade, we were looking for a long-term place to stay, and accidentally met Blanca and Palomino in the street. They introduced us to some neighbours of theirs in Catia, who had a room to rent in their apartment.

We moved in with Luis, Claret and their son Luisito and daughter Luisana, and then set off for a trip to southern Latin America. We flew to Santiago, Chile, and met up with our friend from Brisbane Penny Glass, as well as looking around the city.

We then went on to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where we met up with Coral's old friends Joan and Alan, who were taking a holiday there. We did some great tourism visits with them, including a walk through a favela, and a short voyage on a yacht on the Rio bay, including a lovely seafood lunch brought out to us by boat from the shore.

Our base was a hostel in the suburb of Botafogo, from where we were able to visit the fabulous beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema. We also did walks around the

area, including to the wonderful Botanical Gardens and the Rodrigo de Freitas Lake.

At Copacabana we saw the beach volleyball contests and the great sand sculptures on the shore. I also took the opportunity to attend a Brazilian soccer match between the Botafogo team and another well-known Rio club, along with another young hostel tourist from Hong Kong.

The undoubted highlight of our Rio visit was our attendance at the annual Mardi Gras, one of the most famous cultural events in the world. We had been strongly advised not to take any extra money or cards with us, and found out why when I felt hands pushing into my pockets in the crowd as we approached the long stadium where the parade was held.

We found a spot in the stands, and were spellbound to see the incredible number of dance and music contingents, with their amazing costumes and floats. An added bonus was that the winning team was headed by a giant statue of Simon Bolivar, reportedly funded by the Chavez government of Venezuela.

After our catch-up together, Joan and Alan went off to visit the Pantanal wetlands in western Brazil, while we took a bus trip to the wonderful Iguazu Falls, on the triple border between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.

We stayed in a comfortable hostel on the Brazilian side, and took a bus to see the falls. The Brazilian view of the falls, the widest series of waterfalls in the world, is more panoramic, and gives one a better overview of Iguazu.

The other side, from Argentina, gives a closer up experience of the falls. So we took a bus ride into Argentina one day to get the alternative viewpoint.

After Iguazu, we took a long overnight bus trip to one of the world's largest cities, Sao Paulo. That was an experience, because our bus was stopped in the middle of the night by police to check for contraband in the luggage.

Arriving in Sao Paulo in the morning, we were confronted with navigating reputedly the most extensive underground train network on the planet, to our next bus terminal. There we took a further bus trip to the small, picturesque town of Paraty on the Atlantic coast, where we stayed in an old hotel, and visited the cultural sights of an ancient Portuguese, cobble-stoned village.

Then we took another bus up the coast to Rio again, observing the grotesque sight of a nuclear power station on the seashore as we travelled up the jungle-covered ocean coastline.

Eventually, we arrived back in Rio de Janeiro, and soon took another plane back to Caracas, via Santiago and Lima again. This was the end of my second trip to the southern cone of Latin America, and succeeded in whetting my appetite for more Latin adventures.

Following our Rio trip, we began to organise in earnest for the AVSN May Day Brigade in late April to early May.

Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba

The next stage of our 2006 Latin American sojourn was an unexpected trip to Ecuador, and briefly, Colombia in May.

Our friend John Cleary, the former ETU organiser and strong supporter of Venezuela, and a Colombian-Australian colleague, had helped to organise the brigade, and also wanted to show solidarity with the struggle in Colombia. We all decided to make a trip to Ecuador, as a base for a foray into its war-torn neighbor.

We flew from Caracas with the Venezuelan airline AeroPostal to Quito, the historic capital of Ecuador. There we stayed in a pleasant hotel in the New Town, where the tourist centre is situated.

While in Quito, we visited the Spanish-colonial Old Town, which was one of the archetypal examples of the cities of the Spanish empire in Latin America. Overall, Quito is probably the most striking historic cities of all of the Americas I have visited.

From Quito, we took a bus trip to the north to a town not far from the Colombian border. Then, after some discussions with contacts, we travelled by mini-bus through the night to a village, next to the border which is formed by the Rio San Miguel.

We spent a rather sleepless night in a hut there, and rose early to board a motorised canoe with a couple of guides, who took us up river, and around bends till we entered a side stream, and eventually were taken to a secret jungle camp maintained by FARC guerrillas. I still don't know whether the camp was actually inside Colombia or across the river border in Ecuador.

Years later, the Colombian military bombed a camp inside Ecuador and killed many FARC troops and the commander we had met with in April 2006, as well as some foreign solidarity activists. I'm not sure if it was the same camp, or if the guerrillas had moved in the meantime.

That visit was a real experience. It was quite scary, not knowing if the Colombian regime would attack at any time, especially at night.

During the night, we slept in hammocks under a make-shift shelter, woken up every hour or two by the loud click of rifles being cocked, as the guards changed shift. You could only admire the courage and determination of these mostly young fighters for democracy and freedom, who faced enormous dangers with humour and resilience.

They were very kind to us, as foreigners who had come to show solidarity and help

carry the message to the world outside, as best we could. The commander was very friendly and gave us an interview about the history of the struggle and its future.

Tragically, he was eventually killed when the camp was bombed by government forces. He had been a doctor, but was forced to go into the jungle and take up arms many years ago by the murderous repression of the regime.

After a couple of days, we returned to Ecuador by the river again. From the village near the border, we went on to a town, I think Lago Agrio, a real frontier outpost. There, we took an internal plane back to Quito.

In Quito, we attended an international conference organised by the Socialist Party of Ecuador on “Socialism in Latin America”, on May 17-18. I remember getting really sick in the stomach, and desperately trying to find a toilet at the conference venue because of a serious attack of diarrhea on the first day.

We were delighted to obtain an interview with Celia Hart, a leading figure in the Cuban revolution, who was attending the conference. We later published her interview in our book, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, under the heading: “Venezuela means a new life for Cuba”.

We returned to Caracas, and settled in for a short time, before our next trip — to Cuba, for the celebrations of the country’s July 26 national day.

It was great to visit Cuba, the heroic survivor of the anti-Communist crusade of the Cold War in the LA region, and an ongoing inspiration to us and so many socialist activists around the world.

We were met by Coral’s friend Efrain who took us to his mother’s flat near the centre of Havana, where we stayed for a week or more, after a night in a casa particular (or family hostel). We used to walk in to the city centre, and around Old Havana, which is one of UNESCO’s World Heritage cities.

Old Havana is absolutely stunning, one of the most beautiful sites I have seen in my life, so well renovated and preserved. Luckily for history, Cuba had a revolution and was not subject to capitalist destruction and “redevelopment”.

However, it is clear that the US Blockade has seriously impeded the Cubans’ ability to fix up the rest of the city, which is severely run down and urgently needs a coat of paint. Nevertheless, the solidarity, good humour and liveliness of the Cuban people shines through in Havana and throughout Cuba.

We visited the plaza where Che’s portrait dominates the huge square, as well as the Ernest Hemingway boat marina, his room in the hotel in Old Havana and many other historic sites and places.

We also took a Chinese-made bus on the long trip through the middle of the island to Santiago de Cuba, at the southern end. We stayed in a friendly casa particular

there, and visited the old city.

A highlight was to get up before dawn and attend the commemoration and recreation of Fidel's attack on the Moncada Barracks of 1956. After that, we took an early bus and travelled to the city of Bahia, where we had heard Fidel was to speak at the annual July 26 celebration rally.

Unfortunately, we were too late to actually hear him speak, and could only visit the site of the rally and see where it had occurred hours earlier. That was a pity, but we couldn't do everything in one day.

From Bahia, we took another bus to Trinidad de Cuba, a historic town on the southern-central coast. We stayed in another casa particular, where the host cooked us up a fabulous lobster dinner one night.

I turned out he had been a chef at one of the luxury hotels on the Trinidad beach, so we were very lucky. We took a train ride out into the countryside and visited one of the old haciendas at the centre of a sugar plantation in the old days.

We also swam in the warm, clear waters of the Caribbean Sea, which was magic. While we were in Trinidad, we visited a street café in a plaza, where Cuban dancers did the salsa, and other traditional Cuban acts.

From there we took another bus back to Havana and spent some more wonderful times before flying back to Caracas on Cubana Airlines.

The next major part of our year in Venezuela was a wonderful trip down to the Amazonas region to visit the Cerro Autana (Magic Mountain) in September. We caught a bus from Caracas to the Amazonas capital of Puerto Ayacucho, on the mighty Orinoco River.

It was a long and tiring bus ride, including a huge traffic jam when a truck accident occurred on the road to San Fernando de Apure, in the midst of the Llanos, or plains, region in the centre of the country.

It was the wet season, and the plains were under water for much of the way. It was amazing to be travelling along a raised roadway, right through wetlands virtually covered in water, with clumps of grass and trees dotted around.

We crossed the wide expanse of the Orinoco River on a car ferry, as well as tributaries of LA's second largest river, and other smaller rivers on our long journey.

Arriving eventually in Puerto Ayacucho, we took a taxi to the Residencia Internacional, which was a pleasant enough hostel in a side street of the town. From there, we attended the tour company run by a friend of a friend in Caracas.

Soon, we were taken by mini-bus to the riverside, where we and our tour group boarded a long canoe, powered by outboard motor, and staffed by an Indigenous driver and guide, for the exciting trip up river.

The Rio Orinoco is very wide and fast, and we saw in the distance major rapids which were impassable by boat. We continued into the Rio Sipapo and then into the Rio Autana, until we eventually reached a village on a river bend, where we disembarked and stopped for the night.

The villagers were very friendly and hospitable, and showed us with pride the new school and power plant the Chavez government had built for them. We slept in hammocks under a shelter for the night.

Next day, we re-entered the canoe and went a few kilometres before heading off into the trees which formed the edge of the river, which had swelled in the wet season to cover much of the jungle there. Finally, we got as near as possible to the land, and had to trudge through shallow water for a bit to reach the shore.

Once there, we began a long walk up through dense jungle along a track toward the towering Autana mountain in the distance. At one point, I was at the front, and nearly jumped a metre in the air when I saw a giant monkey spider, with a body as big as your clenched fist, and legs even wider, on the path.

We warily walked on a wide circle around the spider, and continued on our adventure. Gradually, the jungle cleared and we could clearly see the magnificent mountain in the distance, just as the track began to get steeper.

In the end, we had to climb up the side of virtual cliffs to get to a plateau where you could properly view the mountain across a deep valley. It was a wonderful experience, and somewhere we have great photos of the vista.

Then we wended our way back down the track and to the boat, and returned to the village before dusk. It had been a terrific day, as part of a great trip.

We then travelled further on the canoe to another village, where we were welcomed and given some education in the life of the Indigenous peoples of the Amazonas in Venezuela.

Later, we returned to Puerto Ayacucho, where we spent a day or two looking around the town, and visiting the Indigenous Market and Museum.

Then, we took the long bus ride back to Caracas.

Tour of Western Venezuela

Not too long after this, in late September-October 2006, we undertook our big tour of western Venezuela, on a huge bus trip from Caracas in a big circle to Coro, then Maracaibo, then through Zulia state, bordering Colombia, to Tachira, and then back to Merida, and home to Caracas via Barinas.

First stop was the historic Spanish colonial city of Coro on the Caribbean coast. There we stayed in a wonderful French-run hostel, replete with hanging plants and statues.

We walked around the city, which is one of the best preserved historic cities remaining in Venezuela. It was also the centre of the original fight for national independence under Francisco de Miranda, before he was replaced as leader by Simon Bolivar.

From Coro we took a day trip to the Peninsula de Paraguana, one of the centres of the oil refineries. On the way, we saw the bizarre desert landscape near Coro, with its huge sand dunes, in the middle of a jungle region.

On the peninsula, we were able to stop and swim at a small village on the east coast, before returning by bus to Coro.

In Coro, we walked around the historic plazas and visited grand churches. We also took a tour into the mountains outside Coro, where we were able to talk to members of Mission Vuelvan Caras about the work of the mission in training local people in establishing horticulture and tourism ventures.

We also saw some classic Venezuelan films one night at a cinema in the town.

Next, we boarded another bus to travel across the huge Lake Maracaibo to the city of Maracaibo, Venezuela's second city, and home to the original oil industry of the country.

The lake is terribly polluted, with a yellow-colored film lying on top of the water, a result of decades of oil leakages. This is a heritage of Venezuela's dominant oil industry, which will take the revolution many more years to rectify.

We stayed in a modest hotel, I think called Hotel Caribe, a couple of blocks from the main plaza, called the Paseo de las Ciencias, which was created as result of the demolition of most of the historic centre of Maracaibo in 1973. The only historic church remaining is nearby, the Church of Santa Barbara.

We wandered through the city, and took a bus ride to Parque La Marina, where we had a pleasant lunch and took a stroll along the shore, with a view over the lake and part of the city.

Another day, we chanced upon a conference of Mission Cultura, the national culture mission, where we interviewed Marlon Contreras, an organiser of the mission. He discussed the vital role of film and other cultural forms in redeveloping Venezuela's historic and contemporary culture.

We also visited the Maracaibo library, where we heard a right-wing opposition view that Maracaibo and Zulia state should secede from Venezuela to keep their oil reserves to themselves, and not "prop up" the rest of the country.

From Maracaibo, we boarded another bus to travel through the Zulia countryside on a long ride, close to the Colombian border in part, to the state of Tachira. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit the amazing area of Catatumbo, where the famous Catatumbo Lightning phenomenon exists.

The sight of lightning flashing constantly without accompanying thunder is a wonder of the world, according to reports. We should have found the extra time to take a trip there in retrospect.

We stayed in the capital of Tachira, San Cristobal, a fairly modern city, without much in the way of historic sites. However, we did visit the beautiful village of San Pedro del Rio, around 40 kms away from the city, and stayed a night there.

This village is a well-preserved model of an old Spanish town, with cobbled streets and Spanish-style houses, and markets with artisan wares for sale. It is a favorite holiday spot for the residents of San Cristobal, but was pleasantly quiet when we visited.

Things were relatively stable when we were there, with no sign of the right-wing Colombian paramilitaries who were reputed to come across the border to carry out operations at certain times.

From Tachira, we took another bus to the historic city of Merida, high in the Andean mountains, where we alighted at the central bus station and took a city bus to the old part of town. There we stayed at the Posada El Floridita, not far from the Teleferico up to Pico Bolivar, Venezuela's highest mountain.

The hostel was run by Cuban gusanos unfortunately, but was OK otherwise. We took several walks around the historic centre of Merida, including Plaza Bolivar and the Cathedral of Merida opposite.

Our major adventure was the trip up on the Teleferico, which is in four stages up to the summit. My stomach played up a bit at the high altitude, so I decided to stop at the third station, Loma Redondo, at over 4000m. Coral continued on to the final stop at Pico Espejo and then returned to meet me.

From there we undertook a major adventure by taking mountain ponies on a long and steep track down to the picturesque village of Los Nevados. The ponies clearly would have preferred to pitch us over the edge of the cliff into the steep gorge below, but fortunately our guide kept them under control.

However, that was the hardest ride I've experienced for many decades, and our backsides were really sore by the time we reached the village. Nevertheless, the scenery was magnificent, as we gradually wended our way down the mountain side.

Los Nevados is a charming hamlet, around 2400m high, with Spanish-style houses and a pleasant hostel to stay in. We stayed there one night, then took a hair-raising trip

in the back of a utility truck down the mountain, teetering on the brink of precipices a thousand metres down to the river valley below.

From Merida, we took a further bus down the mountain to the plains city of Barinas, the family home of President Hugo Chavez. The scenery travelling down was spectacular, and we thought we should visit again some time and stay.

In Barinas, we stayed in the Hotel International, opposite Plaza Zamora, not far from the centre of town. In the evening, we wandered around the city and visited a museum called the Casa de la Cultura, next to Plaza Bolivar.

Next morning, October 7, we walked into town again and saw a queue of people outside the Bank of Venezuela building. Upon inquiring, we found they were women from Mission Vuelvan Caras (About Face), who were waiting for the bank to open to receive government payments to support their co-operatives.

We did an interview with them, which is published in the *Voices from Venezuela* book. We also did another interview with other people receiving support from the government to form co-operatives.

From Barinas, we headed back to Caracas, ending our month-long adventure around the western section of Venezuela. It was a fascinating, and illuminating, trip, and emphasised to us the variety and beauty of the country, and the vitality and resilience of its people, who are taking on the old order and attempting to change their society in a fundamental way.

During October and November 2006, Coral and I began preparations for the AVSN Solidarity Brigade from Australia.

Nov-Dec 2006 Venezuela Brigade

Following are two accounts of the November-December 2006 AVSN Solidarity Brigade to Venezuela, published in early 2007, after we had returned to Australia:

A year inside the Venezuelan revolution by Paul Benedek,
Brisbane, *Green Left Weekly*, February 9, 2007

"We have just spent the most exciting year of our lives residing in Venezuela. It's the heartland of the most important radical political upheaval of our time, and centre of the project for socialism in the 21st century," enthused Jim McIlroy who, along with Coral Wynter, spent 2006 in Caracas reporting on the Bolivarian revolution for *Green Left Weekly*.

McIlroy and Wynter detailed their experiences to almost 100 people at the CEPU

Auditorium on February 3 at a forum organised by *Green Left Weekly* and sponsored by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN).

“The changes erupting in Venezuela, and now spreading across Latin America, provide a base and an inspiration for people seeking to challenge the domination of neoliberal capitalism all across the globe”, McIlroy said. “The message we bring back from Venezuela is that there is hope for socialism. The imperialist monster, centred in the US, with the support of allies like the Australian government, can be challenged and defeated.

“The most appropriate description of the revolutionary process in Venezuela is the phrase put forward by Vladimir Lenin of revolution as ‘a festival of the oppressed’.

“Led by socialist president Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan people are taking hold of their own destiny. They are seizing control of the economic resources and political power of the country, and challenging the rule of the oligarchy and the foreign capitalists who have traditionally dominated Third World countries like Venezuela,” McIlroy said.

McIlroy and Wynter discussed the recent presidential election campaign, in which Chavez won a new term with around 63% of the vote; the gains of the revolution; the struggles of workers, women and indigenous people; and the rise of a new people's democracy linked to the neighbourhood-based communal councils.

Wynter and McIlroy described their abode in Catia, a working-class suburb of Caracas, and how they had been welcomed into the community activities and outings of the local Chavista movement, including being made honorary members of the Grandmothers' Club.

McIlroy and Wynter also described the development of the international movement in solidarity with Venezuela, including the visit of several Australian brigades to Venezuela, sponsored by the AVSN. They urged everyone to join the solidarity movement in Australia and to consider participating in one of the AVSN-sponsored brigades to Venezuela. The first one this year is being organised to coincide with May Day, with a special focus on trade union solidarity.

“We are very optimistic that the Venezuelan people can carry forward their revolution,” Wynter said. “Their struggle to build an alternative society is so inspiring. Our job in Australia is to give them all the solidarity and support that we can.”

Nov-Dec 2006 Venezuela Brigade: a unique experience by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, *Green Left Weekly*, February 2, 2007

“Brilliant, fantastic, inspiring ... Never shaken so many hands in one day,” commented Pat Rogers, a Brisbane staff member of the Electrical Trades Union, after experiencing

the May Day march of more than 1 million workers in Caracas during the Australian trade union solidarity brigade to Venezuela in April-May last year. People in Australia will have the opportunity to join a May Day brigade to Venezuela again this year, from April 30 to May 9, organised by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN).

Like last year, participants in the 2007 May Day brigade will meet with unions and workers' organisations, visit factories under *cogestion* (workers' co-management), educational bodies, missions (social projects) and other groups involved in the Bolivarian revolution that is transforming the Venezuelan social system in the direction of "socialism of the 21st century".

At the end of last year, another group of 36 people from Australia, New Zealand and Europe participated in a presidential election brigade to Venezuela, from November 25 to December 6. More than 120 people have joined one of the five AVSN-sponsored brigades in the last two years.

Participants in the brigade last December were able to observe the crucial Venezuelan presidential election, which resulted in the return, with 63% of the vote, of socialist president Hugo Chavez. The *brigadistas* had the unique experience of joining some 2.5 million Venezuelans at Chavez's final election rally in Caracas on November 26.

The packed brigade itinerary included visits to the Bolivarian University, the Catia endogenous zone (incorporating workers' cooperatives), the historic Barrio January 23 and community television station Catia TV, all in Caracas. It also included meetings with the Civic-Military Bolivarian Front, the national women's organisation INAMUJER, the revolutionary youth organisation Frente Francisco de Miranda, and a parliamentary leader of the Communist Party of Venezuela.

The brigade separated into two groups to visit the regional towns of Coro and Barquisimeto, to meet with representatives of communal councils, education and health missions and agricultural cooperatives. They also had discussions with prominent commentators on the Bolivarian revolutionary process.

These kinds of exciting events will be part of the agenda for the May Day brigade this year. The deadline for registering for the May Day brigade is February 28.

Trip to Europe

Shortly after the Venezuela brigade finished in early December 2006, we began our epic voyage home to Australia, via Europe. The start was not very auspicious, when we arrived at La Guaira airport on the coast, only to find that our tickets to Madrid had not been confirmed, and we couldn't travel on the original date.

Instead, we had to take a short stop at a nearby town for a couple of days until another booking could be arranged. In the end, it was probably a lucky break, because it allowed us to relax and take it easy in a hotel beside the sea, walk around the area, and chill out after our mammoth year in revolutionary Venezuela.

It had been a wonderful stay, and a tremendous introduction to the real life of a revolution in action, not just in theory. We will always treasure the time spent with the Venezuelan people, and their historic struggle to change their society and the world.

Eventually, we boarded our Iberian Airlines flight to Madrid, and next day arrived at the wonderful capital of Spain. We stayed in a pleasant hostel in the centre of the city, and then walked around the plazas and the grand calles.

We visited the major museums and art galleries: the Prado Museum, the Thyssen-Bornemisza gallery, and the Reina Sofia museum, where we saw Picasso's famous *Guernica* on display. We also visited Retiro Park, and the Plaza Mayor, where we tasted our first round of tapas delicacies.

During our stay in Madrid, we had dinner with a comrade from the Spanish Fourth International who had lived in Canberra for a time as an official in the embassy. He treated us to a great dinner, complete with special regional drinks.

From Madrid we flew to London, landing at Heathrow Airport and catching the train out to Joan and Alan's house. They have a great three-storey house in the suburbs, with Joan's chiropody clinic in the front and the bedrooms upstairs.

We spent about a week in London, seeing all the famous sights: The Tate Gallery, the National Gallery, British Museum, London Bridge, the Tower, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Covent Garden, and all the shopping areas.

We also visited the famous Karl Marx statue in Highgate Cemetery, which was an inspiring experience — especially with the plinth festooned with notes of solidarity from visitors around the world. The statue was also notable for being almost the only part of the unkempt cemetery which was not covered with weeds and ivy! Hopefully, this has all changed nowadays.

While staying with Joan, Alan and the girls, we had a nice night at a typical old British pub, tasting the local brew and food. I remember a number of walks around historic areas, and also Coral got sick and was able to get free treatment under the National Health Service (NHS) in a nearby hospital.

Among notable experiences in London I remember were walks around the Tower of London and along the Thames Embankment, and a trip to Greenwich where we saw the Royal Observatory, the Cutty Sark ship, and walked under the Thames pedestrian tunnel.

Eventually, we bade the family goodbye and took the Underground out to the airport again, only to find that all the planes had been cancelled due to a real London pea-souper (fog). We ended up arranging another flight to Prague on Xmas Eve, and returned to Joan and Alan's for another few days.

Finally, we set off on the next stage of our adventure, successfully catching a British Airways flight to Prague, and arriving in the evening of December 24. What we hadn't fully appreciated was that Xmas Eve was the real Christmas celebration time for much of Europe.

First problem was that some of our luggage brought all the way from Venezuela was missing. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it included mainly a suitcase containing our purchases from our year in Latin America, so was not required on our European travels.

In fact, when we arrived home in Brisbane eventually it turned up delivered to our home by courier!

Next, we had a lot of trouble even finding a taxi from the airport to the city, and then we were dropped outside a darkened former monastery, where we had booked for the night by internet.

No one seemed to be home, but eventually we woke someone up who told us the managers were away in the country for Xmas. Somehow we had managed to book a room, but it was really not available. Later, we did get our money back and an apology from the owners.

Anyway, it didn't matter too much because we managed to find a nearby hotel which was nice and not too expensive. We got a little insight into working conditions, because the young woman looking after the hotel was a worker from Eastern Europe, who had to stay 24/7 at the hotel, sleeping on a couch behind the counter.

She was very nice to us, and we had a pleasant stay in beautiful Prague, the old city with its lovely river and historic buildings.

We walked around the old city, visited the castle on the hill, and the town square with its cobblestones and Good King Wenceslas monument. We had a pleasant dinner at night in an underground restaurant, including Pilsener.

We also watched a group of crazy young men swim in the icy cold river in an annual race. And we walked across the ancient bridges, which gave a grand view of the old city.

Next, we boarded a train which took us all the way through the Czech Republic to the border of neighbouring Austria, and then on to the capital Vienna. Vienna is one of the most picturesque cities in the world, with the architecture and treasures of a great medieval empire to behold.

We stayed in a youth hostel in the heart of the city, and walked around the historic centre, seeing palaces, cathedrals and parklands. A highlight was the visit to the great palace of the Hapsburgs, surrounded by a wonderful park, which was dedicated to one of the queens of the realm.

I remember one pleasant morning when we stopped for coffee in a traditional Viennese café, and drank coffee with real cream on top. What a luxury!

Next stopover was the amazing city of Barcelona on the southern coast of Spain. There, we stayed in a little hotel in a narrow side-street, surrounded by bars and restaurants.

Barcelona was a feast for the tourist. We walked around the city, and along the seashore. We took a cablecar to the historic fort on the top of a hill overlooking the city.

And we took the train to the unique church Sagrada Familia, designed by the famous architect Gaudi, which is still under construction after a hundred years. We also visited several museums and heard a band of musicians playing the traditional music of Catalonia.

We also met up with Dick Nichols' companion Montserrat, who took us to a scrumptious Catalan lunch one day. She was working in the state health system, and we could only meet up once during our stay.

The final stop on our European sojourn was Italy. We flew to Rome, and caught the train to the capital, alighting at the Termini Centrale station.

Assisted as always by our trusty *Lonely Planet*, we found a great little hotel nearby in a side street. The woman owner gave us breakfast included in the price.

Rome was a revelation. The capital of the old Roman Empire is full of historic buildings and ruins at every turn.

By then we had discovered that we needed a proper visa for our next planned stopover in India, so we visited the Indian Embassy and found that it would take a week to obtain the visa.

This meant that we had an extra few days in Rome, although it meant cutting short our stay in India, including eliminating a planned train trip from New Delhi to Mumbai. Oh well, we made the best of it by having time to thoroughly explore the ancient city of Roma.

This meant visiting all the major sites: the Colosseum; the Pantheon; the Trevi Fountain; the Forum; the Vatican including St Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel; the River Tiber and countless other places. We lost count of the number of churches we visited, mostly by foot.

However, our exploration was assisted by two tourist bus circuits, on the hop-on,

hop-off method. One trip went around the main sites of the Roman Empire in the city itself; the second took us out into the countryside to see some Roman Baths and the Catacombs, where the Christians buried their bodies, and also hid out from persecution at various times.

I was amazing to see some of the excavations of Roman ruins, which are still being uncovered all around the place. It was an educational and moving experience.

One day we took a trip to Florence by train, and visited Michelangelo's famous statue of David. We also walked around the historic city of Florence, including seeing the covered bridges across the river.

While it was great to visit Florence, we were disappointed that we were not able to take a side trip to Venice during our stay in Italy. We could not take the chance that our visa might come through, or that there might be a problem that we had to resolve, while we were away from Rome for more than one day.

Nevertheless, the whole stay in Rome was a wonderful experience, which I remember to this day. It helps you to understand the marvels and also the tragedies of human history, and the challenge of trying to build for a future society.

Finally, we received our visas for India, and were able to finalise our flights to Mumbai, via Hong Kong. Because of the delay, we had to cut short the last stage of our round-the-world trip, including just a few days in India.

We boarded our Cathay Pacific plane and headed off to Hong Kong for a stopover of a couple of days. Hong Kong airport is one of the largest and most modern in the world.

We took a bus into the city, and stayed at the YMCA. Although we had stayed in HK previously in 2000, it was interesting to see the changes in the city and its skyline during the last few years.

Then, it was off to Mumbai. There we left our luggage in a holding centre, and took the bus to a seaside town and stayed in a small hotel for a couple of days.

We tasted the local Indian food in small cafes, and walked on the beach, surrounded by a posse of young girls begging for money. We did manage to take the train into Mumbai proper, and boarded a boat to visit a historic island in the bay, with some ancient Hindu monuments there.

Finally, we took the bus back to the airport, noting the dreadful poverty of the people living in the suburbs throughout Mumbai, picked up our luggage, and prepared to fly back to Australia.

There was one more hold-up as the plane was delayed, and the airline gave us a free dinner in the airport restaurant to send us on our way. Then, we were in the air and winging our way back home after an incredible year: living the people's revolution in Venezuela, the other experiences of Latin America, and the rich impressions of our

European sojourn on the way back.

Once Coral and I were back in Brisbane in January 2007, my political work continued in building the Socialist Alliance and distributing *Green Left Weekly*. At the top of the agenda in 2007 was the build-up to the forthcoming federal election later that year, and the Howard government's introduction of the draconian, anti-union "Work Choices" industrial legislation.

Visit to Pakistan

Then, in March I was asked by the DSP party leadership to make a visit to Pakistan to observe the national conference of the Pakistan Labour Party (LPP), and also view the struggle of the lawyers against the dictator General Pervez Musharraf.

It was an eye-opening experience. I hadn't visited Pakistan since late 1967, when I travelled through the country as part of my mini-van tour from London across to Calcutta, India.

I stayed with Farooq Tariq's family in Lahore, and had a great time. When I arrived, I found that the conference had been postponed because of the democratic movement of the lawyers, and the solidarity work which needed to be done urgently.

I joined in with an LPP contingent in a march and rally demanding democratic rights in Pakistan and the removal of President Musharraf. It was amazing to see lawyers in their British-style full gowns and wigs sitting down, and launching hunger strikes for their political cause.

Below are two articles I wrote for *GLW* describing the lawyers' campaign:

Pakistan's democracy movement defies repression by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, March 29, 2007

Around 5000 lawyers protesting on March 21 vowed not to rest until they succeed in removing General Pervez Musharraf from office, forcing the withdrawal of the reference against Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and gaining assurance of a full independent judiciary capable of protecting the constitution. They called for the establishment of a truly democratic government through free and fair elections. The dispute was sparked on March 9 when Musharraf suspended Chaudhry.

The lawyers will remain undaunted against the "black acts" of the rulers, while waging a struggle for the rule of law and for the supremacy of the constitution, Ahsan Bhoon, president of the Lahore High Court Bar Association, told the "black coats" after their lunchtime march through the city mall.

“No more victimisation by the government will be tolerated as the whole nation has been awakened”, Bhoon told the rally, according to the March 22 English-language daily *The Nation*. The lawyers had expressed their determination during a sit-in, after marching through the streets chanting anti-government slogans.

The authorities largely held back from attacking the protesters this time, following widespread criticism of police repression of a March 17 demonstration. On that occasion, police fired tear gas shells into the crowd and used batons to beat lawyers and journalists.

Lawyers have continued to stage walk-outs from their court duties, and members of the Save the Judiciary Committee have carried out a hunger strike in support of their demands, as the campaign escalates in cities across Pakistan.

In Islamabad, lawyers marched to the Supreme Court building to protest the charges against Chaudhry, despite police barricading streets all around the court precinct. In Quetta, police fired tear gas and baton-charged the protesters, injuring several lawyers. Some of the lawyers burned their black coats in protest.

Political parties, including members of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the Muslim-based Muttahida Majlesi Amal (MMA), held separate rallies in support of the demands of the lawyers. Police had arrested more than 250 opposition party activists in early morning raids in Islamabad and Rawalpindi to prevent them joining the protests in front of the the Supreme Court in the capital.

In a joint statement on March 21, United Nations representatives Leandro Despouy and Hina Jilani called on Pakistani authorities to remedy the situation, according to a report in the March 22 edition of *The Nation*. “Demonstrators, including lawyers, journalists, political activists and civil society actors, have taken to the streets since March 12 to protest against this presidential decision, which is broadly seen as an attack against the independence of the judiciary.

“Law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have used force in an excessive manner against peaceful demonstrators, and have arrested several of them. Also, journalists were physically hindered from reporting on the events.”

Further rallies were held in cities all around Pakistan on March 26, calling for the reinstatement of Chaudry and the removal of Musharraf from office. The major rallies, organised by the ARD, also demanded that an independent Chief Election Commission be constituted, under the supervision of an impartial person, to hold general elections under a caretaker government.

The leaders of the ARD vowed to fight for the independence of the judiciary, the restoration of real democracy and the supremacy of parliament. The main parties involved in the ARD are the PPP and the Muslim League-Nawaz League. Other opposition parties including the MMA supported the rallies.

In Lahore, some 5000 people marched in separate contingents to the High Court building, despite police hindrance and harassment. Carrying party flags and chanting anti-Musharraf slogans, they converged on the court, where they were greeted by a large number of black-coated advocates (lawyers).

The Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) held separate marches in 11 cities, which linked up with the main rallies in the major centres. In both Lahore and Karachi, several hundred LPP supporters staged militant protest marches, carrying red flags, in the face of police harassment. Karachi marchers carried portraits of Latin American revolutionary leader Che Guevara, and demanded an end to the present “rotten system”, according to the March 27 *Nation*.

All the rallies proceeded despite severe state repression, including mass arrests of party workers on the day before the protests. Punjab PPP general secretary Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas told the March 27 *Daily Dawn* newspaper that police had arrested about 1000 workers from all around the state of Punjab, although almost all of them had been released by the evening of March 26.

In Peshawar, leaders of various secular and religious parties, speaking at a joint public meeting on March 26, stressed the need for launching a “decisive and concerted movement against military rulers and their hand-picked corrupt politicians to rid the country of lawlessness, corruption and poverty”, according to the March 27 *Daily Dawn*.

The next major mobilisation is scheduled for April 3, to coincide with Chaudhry’s appearance before the High Court to answer trumped-up charges of misuse of office resources.

It is widely viewed that Chaudhry is really being charged for standing up to the Musharraf regime, threatening to challenge any attempt to hold fraudulent elections later this year, and for foreshadowing an exposure of the government’s corrupt privatisation of the Habib Bank.

A victory for democratic forces by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, March 29, 2007

“Today was a victory for democratic forces, not only for the Labour Party Pakistan, but for all the other parties who were able to go onto the streets in support of democratic rights”, LPP general secretary Farooq Tariq told *Green Left Weekly*’s Jim McIlroy in Lahore on March 26, following a round of demonstrations.

“The LPP organised rallies in 11 cities to express solidarity with the advocates’ [lawyers’] movement for democracy and justice. We had 300 people in Lahore, more than that in Karachi, and hundreds in other towns around Pakistan. Comrades were

arrested in Multan before the rally there.

“In Lahore, police tried to stop the march midway on route to the Lahore High Court, but we were still able to reach the main venue. They tried to seize our red flags. Police had harassed us, and attempted to pressure us to cancel our rally, under threat of being arrested. But the LPP comrades were not daunted, were ready to be arrested if necessary.”

Tariq explained that the LPP was planning another round of larger rallies to coincide with the nationwide mobilisations on April 3, when suspended Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry faces court. “Today was the beginning of a movement to overthrow the Musharraf military regime. We will work together with the left alliance, and the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy [ARD — the alliance of the major opposition parties against the government].

“Today was a defeat for the military regime, which tried to stop the LPP march in Lahore. They threatened us with dire consequences, but we didn’t budge an inch. It was a war of nerves with the police, and we won.”

Noting that the ARD rally in Lahore attracted some 5000 people, Tariq said, “The regime is being weakened by this rising mass movement”.

The slogans raised by the LPP at the rallies included “Musharraf, your time is up!”; “You and I have been in hunger because GHQ [General Head Quarters] has looted all the resources”; and “Take back the reference against the chief justice, no restrictions against the judiciary”.

Explaining that the LPP had only three days to prepare the rallies and had to postpone the party’s national congress, Farooq said, “But the movement is growing. People along the route in Lahore were happy and supportive of our march. And we were warmly welcomed by the crowd of Pakistan People’s Party supporters when we arrived at the High Court. There was also a good speech of welcome to us from the president of the Bar Association.

“We want to build this movement as a really mass-based mobilisation. A crack in the regime has been forced. Now, the government cannot control the movement of the advocates, joined by the political parties.”

According to Tariq, “Privatisation in Pakistan has been the real looting and plundering of the public sector. For example, the state-owned Habib Bank was privatised in 2004 for US\$370 million. The real assets of the bank, according to its own sources, were US\$9.5 billion!

“In an exclusive interview with suspended CJ Chaudry in the March 23 *Daily Dawn* newspaper, he said he was going to take notice of this Habib Bank privatisation. In other words, he was threatening to expose massive corruption by the regime. This is

his real crime in the eyes of the government.”

Tariq said that “We will be very happy if international workers’ organisations can coordinate with this movement and hold demonstrations in front of Pakistan embassies around the world. We call on all our international friends to do what they can to organise protests in front of Pakistani institutions to support our struggle against the Musharraf regime.”

My visit to Pakistan included a bus trip to the town of Peshawar, bordering Afghanistan, where the LPP branch were excited to hear my report on the developing revolution in Venezuela.

It was a unique experience to see a roomful of white-bearded elderly men so supportive of Chavez and the popular mobilisation in Venezuela. Their main question was, how can we achieve a similar revolution in Pakistan?

Then I was taken to a village outside Peshawar controlled by communist forces, which was close to another one run by the Afghan Taliban. The people told me that they had to remain vigilant at all times and heavily armed to deter the Taliban from launching attacks on their village.

When I returned to Lahore, we went on a long car trip to a town outside the city, where I was greeted with full honours, and a rosette declaring, “Jim McIlroy, chief guest.” I still have it on the wall of our house in Chippendale!

I was applauded when I presented a report on the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, and the need for international solidarity.

Another anecdote in Lahore was the night they threw a party at the office of an NGO associated with the LPP. Only Christians are allowed to buy alcohol in Pakistan, so someone with a Christian ID card was appointed to buy the grog: my goodness, they enjoyed a few drinks, those socialists in strictly teetotal Muslim Pakistan!

Finally, at the end of a week, I was taken on a rather exciting motorbike pillion ride to Lahore airport and flew to the country’s largest city, Karachi. There I was met by another longstanding comrade, and well looked after by his family.

Again, I gave a talk on Venezuela, which was very favorably received. The LPP comrades were so excited by a first-hand account of the achievements of Chavez and the revolution, they found it as a huge inspiration for their own struggle for socialism in Pakistan.

So, eventually my fascinating stay in Pakistan came to an end, and I boarded a flight back to Australia. It was yet another story of the courage and dedication of comrades fighting for democracy and socialism under very difficult conditions.

Back in Brisbane

Upon returning to Brisbane, the major issue of the day was the union movement campaign against PM John Howard's anti-worker "Work Choices" legislation. In April and May 2007, the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) organised stoppages, rallies and marches against the laws, as part of the national Your Rights At Work campaign by the unions.

Then in June, I was preselected to run as the SA candidate for the seat of Griffith in the upcoming federal elections. Following is an article by then DSP Brisbane organiser Paul Benedek about the campaign:

Socialist Alliance challenge to Rudd in Griffith by Paul Benedek, Brisbane, *Green Left Weekly*, June 8, 2007

The Socialist Alliance has decided to run long-time socialist activist Jim McIlroy in Labor leader Kevin Rudd's seat of Griffith in Brisbane's central-south in the federal election. Its nationwide election campaign themes are "People before profits!" and "Planet before profits!"

"We'll be challenging Rudd and the ALP leadership's policy retreats on industrial relations, uranium mining and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars", McIlroy told *Green Left Weekly*.

"The Rudd leadership's backdown on its promise to tear up Work Choices, its ramming through of an open-slasher uranium mining policy, its refusal to reverse the anti-democratic Voluntary Student Unionism law, and its support for the so-called 'anti-terror' laws, make it even more clear that there's a need for real working class political alternative."

"We all want to get rid of the Howard government, but we don't want to replace it with a Labor government with 'me too' policies", McIlroy added.

Socialist Alliance in Queensland has also endorsed a Senate team consisting of prominent Aboriginal leader Sam Watson and Gold Coast union activist Amelia Taylor; and Dr Tim Kirchler, running in the Gold Coast seat of Moncrieff.

I also became involved in the support efforts for the campaign against the Talisman Sabre war games at Shoalwater Bay, near Rockhampton. Paul wrote another article about the issue:

War games a threat to the region by Paul Benedek, Brisbane, *Green Left Weekly*, June 23, 2007

Jim McIlroy, the Socialist Alliance candidate for the Brisbane seat of Griffith, called on

Labor leader Kevin Rudd to condemn the Talisman Sabre war games being held at Shoalwater Bay.

“Why do we need this massive invasion, involving 32,000 military personnel from the US and Australia, in one of the most beautiful areas of our coastline? This area, part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, will be blasted with live ammunition of all kinds.”

McIlroy said the war games are not only an “attack” on Queensland’s environment, but also “a threat to the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region”. “This massive misuse of taxpayers’ money is part of tying the Australian military even more closely to the US superpower”, he explained.

McIlroy said that one of the purposes of the military exercises is to signal to countries in the region not to try to become too independent or carry out policies that challenge Australian and US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific. “If they do, they face the prospect of direct military intervention.”

“This week’s convergence on Rockhampton of peace activists from around Australia sends a strong anti-war message to the Howard and Bush governments. It adds to the worldwide pressure for US and Australian troops to get out of Iraq and Afghanistan immediately”, McIlroy said.

He also called on the government to halt the games to protect seven peace activists, including a 67-year-old grandmother, who entered the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area on June 19.

That election campaign was one of the most enjoyable I’ve been involved in. The “It’s Time” atmosphere meant that it seemed likely that the Coalition government’s days were numbered.

Running in Griffith, along with my old comrade and friend, Aboriginal leader Sam Watson, in the Senate, meant that we had street meetings in West End and elsewhere on the southside of the Brisbane River. We had a BBQ launch in Orleigh Park in West End:

On the socialist campaign trail: A call for socialist ideas by Bill Mason, *Green Left Weekly*, October 26, 2007

Speaking at the launch of Socialist Alliance candidate Jim McIlroy’s campaign for the federal seat of Griffith, held by ALP leader Kevin Rudd, veteran socialist and university lecturer Gary MacLennan called for the continuation of the struggle for socialist ideas.

The BBQ launch, held in Orleigh Park, West End, on October 21, attracted more than 40 people, and preceded an afternoon of letterboxing the local area for the Socialist Alliance campaign.

Today in the Labor Party, there is “not one socialist idea”, MacLennan told the audience. “The ALP is just an echo of the Liberal Party”, he added. With the Socialist Alliance campaign, we want to “prove to everyone that there is an alternative.

“We must remind everyone that there is another way.”

The problem in Australia right now is that “We don’t desire enough. We should desire a better world.” We urgently need to build a socialist alternative to the Liberal-Labor conservative consensus, MacLennan said.

MacLennan strongly endorsed the candidacy of Jim McIlroy as a longstanding friend and socialist activist. “In the struggle, Jim will always be with you”, MacLennan said.

McIlroy addressed the audience, urging people to actively participate in the Socialist Alliance campaign in Griffith, as well as in the neighbouring seat of Brisbane, where Socialist Alliance is running Resistance leader Ewan Saunders. He also called for support for the Socialist Alliance Senate team of Sam Watson and Amelia Taylor.

Referring to an article on his campaign in the October 20 Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, McIlroy said this was already a significant win to gain some prominent coverage for the socialist alternative in the mainstream media. “We need to defeat the Howard government”, McIlroy said, “but we also need to use the Socialist Alliance campaign to raise the banner of the socialist alternative, and put pressure on Kevin Rudd and Labor over their me-too policies.”

An important issue in Brisbane in May-June 2007 was the campaign for academic free speech at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), where Gary MacLennan and a colleague were being disciplined over an issue involving mocking people with a disability, which Gary and his colleague had criticised publicly.

We became involved in the campaign to defend Gary, through attending rallies and writing articles in GLW. Eventually, Gary was forced to leave QUT and found another job with the state education department, but the issue of academic freedom and rights for the disabled received strong support during the campaign.

During that year, in September, I travelled to Sydney for the mass protests against the visit of US warmonger President George W. Bush. I was quoted in a *Green Left* article on the anti-APEC conference demonstrations:

Jim McIlroy, Socialist Alliance candidate for Griffith, Queensland (Kevin Rudd’s seat): “This protest is the voice of the people against the Iraq war and inaction on climate change. We’re facing down the most intensive intimidation campaign in recent history. The people of Sydney, and many from interstate, showed courage and determination in standing up for their right to protest in a peaceful, but spirited, way. This popular show of defiance may turn out to be the final nail in the coffin of the Howard

government.”

Another important issue which arose during 2007 was the arrest and sacking of Gold Coast-based Indian doctor Mohamed Haneef. I was quoted in an October article in *GLW*:

Restore Haneef’s work visa now! by Paul Benedek, Brisbane,
Green Left Weekly, October 5, 2007

The federal government should restore Indian doctor Mohamed Haneef’s work visa immediately, and pay him compensation for distress and financial loss, Jim McIlroy, the Socialist Alliance candidate for the south Brisbane seat of Griffith, told *Green left Weekly*. Griffith is held by ALP leader Kevin Rudd.

“As revealed in the ABC *Four Corners* program on October 1, Dr Haneef is still unemployed three months after being arrested on false charges, vilified and forced out of his job at the Gold Coast Hospital,” McIlroy explained.

“He has had to return to his home in Bangalore, and says he is determined to regain his visa so he can resume his studies and work abroad. He has been forced by the harsh and unjust actions of the Howard government to rely on his savings and family support to survive, along with his wife and newborn child.”

According to McIlroy, “This is an urgent matter of human rights and basic justice. I challenge Kevin Rudd to commit an incoming Labor government to reinstating Dr Haneef’s visa, so he can return to Australia and resume his important work within the ailing Australian public health system.”

McIlroy said the Socialist Alliance has pledged to support Dr Haneef and the campaign to cancel any government appeal against the Federal Court decision to overturn immigration minister Kevin Andrews’ cancellation of the visa. “The alliance is also demanding the repeal of the repressive immigration and ‘anti-terror’ laws on which the whole Haneef debacle is based.” ■



Top: My parents, Ian & Cecily, mid-1940s. *Bottom left:* 1948 — Jim with teddy bear. *Bottom right:* 1948 — Jim at 2 years old: Already worried about the state of the world.





Top: 1949 — Jim with cousin Michael. *Bottom:* 1949 — Jim and Fiona.



Mid-1950s— Cec with kids, Parkdale



Left: 1952 — Jim at Parkdale. *Bottom:* mid 1950s — Fran and Jim with dog Tubby, Mt Eliza.





1964 — Jim with friend Mac MacDermott and VW, Arizona, prior to setting off on trip across USA.



Top: 1972 — Jim speaking at Melbourne forum with Kevin Healy, Jamie Doughney and Bob Hogg. *Bottom:* 1979 — Jim and Coral at *Direct Action* dinner at Glebe Town Hall.





Top: 1979 — Jim with family helping build house at Bonang. Bottom: Mid-1980s — Jim at Resistance Centre, Sydney.





Top: 1980s — Jim and Ian with Chantal and Dayo. *Bottom:* 1980s — Ian and Jim.





Top: 1981 — Chantal and Jim. *Bottom:* Mid-1980s — Jim, Chantal and Coral on holiday, NSW Central Coast.





Top: 1987 — Jim and Chantal. Bottom: 1990s — Katrina, Jim and Chantal in heart.





1990s — Katrina and Jim.



Top: 1990s — Chantal, Jim and Katrina, New Farm. *Bottom:* 1991, February 28 — Jim features in *Courier Mail* report of antiwar protest.





Top: 1994 — Fran, Jim, Katrina, Mark, and Coral. *Bottom:* 1997 — Jim at stall with GLW, Brisbane.



CPSU National Election

May 5 – 26 2000

It's time to PUT THE MEMBERS FIRST

Vote **1** Carcary **1** Banks **1** McIlroy

Our chance to save our union

This election presents a stark choice for CPSU members – the incumbents who have presided over the greatest loss of public sector jobs in Australia's post-war history, or Members First, committed workplace activists who will get our union moving again. The national leadership has failed to act effectively against outsourcing and contracts. Where were they when another 10,000 jobs were slashed from Telstra? They have encouraged the fragmented weak system of agency agreements. Pay rates have fallen behind. Delegates are isolated by bargaining and by undemocratic union bureaucracy. It's time to draw the line. Act to save your long service leave and the few conditions you have left.

Stop putting pressure on delegates to negotiate complex agreements and plan a campaign to return us to APS wide conditions.

Back delegates up with access to organisers, quality training and resources.

Put the resources where the members are. Lets stop wasting money on large central offices, especially when bargaining is devolved to the workplace level. Lets make sure members get 100% value from dues and get organisers back to the workplace. Caird's plan to centralise major union functions will alienate and lose members.

Real member participation will improve decision making across the union. Huge central bureaucracies hinder democratic participation. Let members decide how to spend funds. Members First is working to build an active and democratic union.

Proven success in the ACT government section. Common close dates for all the certified agreements mean it's possible to push for a service wide agreement. All CA's have no cuts to conditions and no forced redundancies. Yes, it's possible to negotiate harder and smarter.

Members First acted to defend Telstra in Queensland. Members First is working hard to build support for the union campaign and is pushing for further action.



Susan Carcary

VOTE

Susan CARCARY

for National Secretary

Marcus BANKS

for National President

Jim McILROY

for Ass Nat Secretary

**CPSU RANK AND FILE
MEMBERS 1ST**

No union resources were used in the production of this leaflet.
Authorised by Susan Carcary 0407 219 195



*Right: 2000s early — Jim at Centrelink
Call Centre function, Brisbane.
Bottom: 2008 — Jim and Coral.*



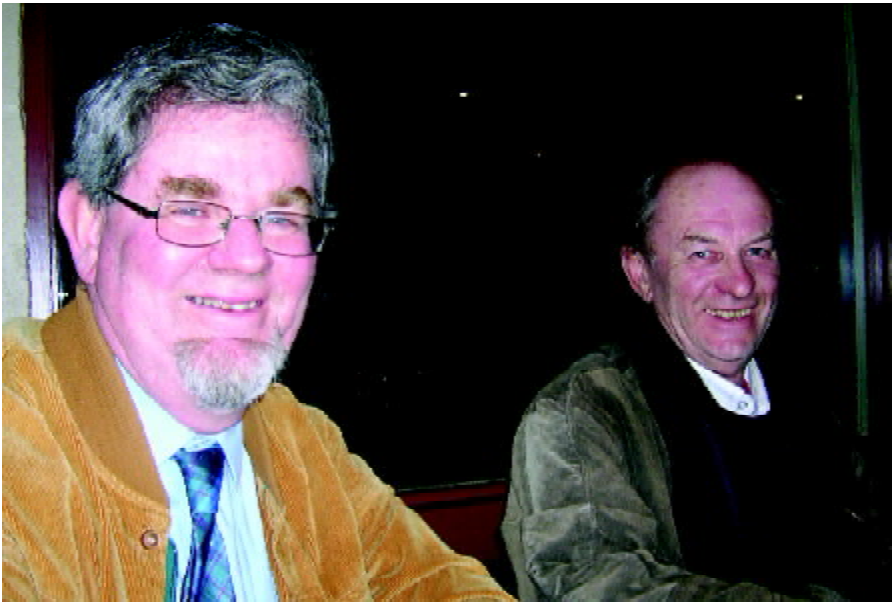


Top: 2008 — Jim with family group. Bottom: 2008 — Chantal and Jim, Footscray.





*Right: 2007 — Jim and Cecily. Bottom:
2008 — Jim speaking at Cec's funeral.*



Top: 2008 — Jim and Geoff. Bottom: 2008 — Jim at statue of Simón Bolívar, Caracas.





Top: 2008 — Jim in new train, Caracas. Bottom: 2008 — Jim in Chavista crowd.



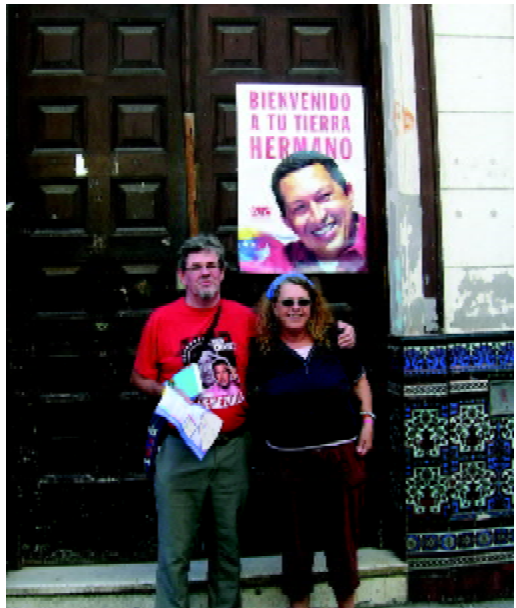


Top: 2008 — Coral and Jim at Allende glasses installation, Caracas. Bottom: 2008 — Jim, union militant Stalin Pérez Borges and Coral, Caracas.





Top: 2009 — Coral and Jim, Mexico City. *Right:* 2009 — Jim and Coral, Caracas.





Top: 2009 — Jim with our Cuban friend Efrain, Havana. Bottom: 2009 — Jim at Trotsky home, Coyoacan, Mexico City.





Top: 2009 — Jim with friend Rodolfo Pacheco, Mexico City. *Bottom:* 2009 — Jim with Yoly and Daniel during Australian tour.





2009 — Katrina and Chantal, India.



Top & bottom: 2010 — Jim at Cabanandra.



Top: 2010-11 — Family, Christmas. Bottom: 2013 — Coral and Jim, Patagonia.





Top: 2010s early — Jim in front of Chavez poster. *Bottom:* 2010s mid — Jim at Venezuela solidarity rally, Sydney.





Top: 2013 — Jim at protest against bank rip-offs, Sydney. Bottom: 2014 — Jim at Hands Off Medicare protest, Sydney.





Top: 2015 — Jim at anti-WestConnex rally. Bottom: 2015 — Jim with MUA leader Joe Deakin, Radical Ideas Conference, Sydney.



Happy 70th Birthday Jim!



From all
your
comrades





Top: 2016 — Jim with MUA comrades, Sydney. *Bottom:* 2016— Jim speaking at First Nations forum, Redfern.



6. Political Life at Home & Away

Labor wins 2007 election

In the end, the Labor Party won the November 24 federal election convincingly, and John Howard lost his seat. I issued a call for the withdrawal of all Australian troops from Iraq immediately, and for Work Choices to be dismantled as soon as possible:

Troops home by Christmas! by Peter Boyle, *Green Left Weekly*,
November 30, 2007

“Now that Labor has decisively won the federal election, it is urgent that Australian troops be withdrawn from Iraq as soon as possible”, Jim McIlroy, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Kevin Rudd’s seat of Griffith, said after the announcement that Labor had defeated the Howard government. McIlroy also called for an end to Australian support for the war in Afghanistan. “All Australian forces should be brought home by Christmas.

“A sizeable majority of the Australian people are in favour of withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq. What better present for them and for the families of the troops themselves than for the new ALP government to act quickly to implement Labor’s pledge for withdrawal from the disastrous occupation of Iraq.

“The Rudd government can also recognise the decisive role of the trade union movement and the anti-Work Choices campaign in defeating the Howard regime by acting immediately to remove key sections of the Work Choices legislation.

“In particular, the new government can support the call by Unions NSW secretary John Robertson to allow workers to withdraw from Australian Workplace Agreements [individual contracts] right now, rather than having to wait up to five years for the agreements to expire. AWAs should be repealed retrospectively, rather than lingering on for years.”

Early in 2008, the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Tet Offensive by the Vietnamese liberation forces was celebrated. I wrote an article in *GLW* to mark this

historic occasion, (under my usual pseudonym, Bill Mason):

Tet offensive commemorated by Bill Mason, *Green Left Weekly*, February 9, 2008

"Forty years ago, the Tet offensive — the decisive battle of the Vietnam War — took place, changing the course of the war, and beginning the long retreat of the US military which eventually led to the victory of the Vietnamese revolutionary national-liberation forces with the fall of Saigon in April 1975", Jim McIlroy said at a public forum in Brisbane on January 31, one of a series sponsored by *Green Left Weekly*.

"On January 31, 1968, fighters of the [North] Vietnamese People's Army and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) launched an all-out assault on cities and towns throughout South Vietnam, catching the US and its puppet regime in Saigon completely by surprise, and stunning the world with their courage and audacity", said McIlroy. "The inspiration provided by Tet helped launch a period of revolutionary upsurge and social gains from the late 1960s on an international scale ... the Tet offensive is one of the truly history-making events of our time."

McIlroy went on to summarise the events of Tet 1968 in Vietnam, and to draw some lessons of the struggle for the anti-war movement of current times. "The anti-war movement of today can take heart from Tet, just as the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s was given enormous impetus from the events of January-February 1968", he said.

The series of forums commenced with a short video presentation of war footage from the Tet offensive, which gave dramatic impact to the discussion that followed. The footage showed events such as the NLF guerrilla attack on the US embassy in Saigon, an attack that amazed the world and helped undermine popular support for the war in the West.

McIlroy addressed forums in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. These were attended by audiences ranging from 12 to 40 people.

In May 2008, Coral co-led a further AVSN-sponsored May Day Brigade to Venezuela. On her return, we organised a forum in Brisbane to report back:

Brigadista reports on May Day in Caracas by Jim McIlroy, May 31, 2008

"The Venezuelan revolution is slowly going forward, despite problems. President Hugo Chavez hasn't stopped for a minute in pushing the process ahead, in the face of serious challenges", Coral Wynter, co-leader of the Australian May Day 2008 solidarity brigade to Venezuela, told a meeting of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network on May

26.

Wynter was presenting an eyewitness account of the AVSN-sponsored brigade, which involved 12 activists visiting Venezuela between April 28 and May 7.

Six Australian unions were represented: the Electrical Trade Union; the Maritime Union of Australia; the Community and Public Sector Union; the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union; the National Tertiary Education Union and Australian Education Union.

The brigade concentrated on meeting equivalent trade union delegates, and industrial workplaces, as well as covering grassroots community groups, women's organisations, Indigenous representatives and community radio stations. The highlight was the half-million strong march of workers on May 1 — May Day — which is a public holiday throughout Venezuela.

Wynter showed photos of thousands of May Day marchers with red T-shirts, representing the numerous unions and popular organisations supporting the Bolivarian revolution. She also “introduced” us to various Venezuelan unionists and community activists the brigadistas had met during their exposure tour. The Australian brigade's banner, made hastily in Caracas, proclaiming solidarity with the Venezuelan struggle, was warmly received by the crowd.

Wynter and brigade co-organiser John Cleary were able to address the huge assembly of workers from the official platform, and they were greeted with loud cheers. The Australian brigadistas were interviewed on the Latin American TV station Telesur, VTV (Channel 8, the Venezuelan government channel), as well as various radio stations. In July, we organised a *Green Left Weekly* forum at the Activist Centre, on the social-environmental crises. I spoke along with Brisbane SA organiser Paul Benedek:

Fighting the twin crises by Bill Mason, *Green Left Weekly*, July 19, 2008

“The world is facing twin disasters in the near future: the coming economic meltdown of the international capitalist system, and the looming climate change crisis”, Jim McIlroy told a *Green Left Weekly* forum on July 15.

Called “The coming economic meltdown ... and the possibilities for fighting back”, the forum featured McIlroy and Paul Benedek, both from the Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance.

The financial crisis, stemming from the US sub-prime mortgage disaster, is now extending into a worldwide recession, McIlroy said. Meanwhile, rapidly rising food prices have already thrown more than 100 million people into starvation or malnutrition, on top of the 860 million already starving.

Oil prices have also escalated to record levels, leading to increased hardship in both Third World and industrialised countries. This only intensifies the global warming threat, which is reaching critical levels.

“The challenge facing the world’s peoples is the most dramatic in history”, McIlroy said. “The only viable option is to replace the capitalist system with socialism.”

Benedek outlined the beginnings of a global fight back by people facing starvation in Haiti, Africa and Asia, and the protests by citizens faced with rocketing fuel prices in recent times.

Benedek stressed that solutions to the combined impact of a capitalist economic crisis and the looming climate change disaster required radical action, not continued reliance on “market forces”.

The solution to the crises lay in socialist programs, such as a massive turn to public transport and toward renewable energy sources over carbon-based producers such as coal. A huge people’s movement would need to build these radical alternatives, Benedek concluded.

Cecily passes away

In July 2008, my dear mother Cecily died after a long period of ill health. Below is a message from my sister Fran about her passing:

Dear darlings, some of whom know this info already,

To let you know the details:

Cec died, aged 88, on Friday, July 18.

She had fallen on Tuesday and reluctantly entered hospital. I optimistically thought she had escaped a break, but sadly she had broken her pelvic girdle, due to osteoporosis, and was looking at a long convalescence from that. Meanwhile a highly qualified heart specialist was at the little Moruya Hospital for a week and had found the reason for Cec’s weakness and low mineral composition of her blood: she had an enlarged heart, which was needing careful drug treatment.

This was commenced at once, and her pain relief was steady to allow her pelvis to mend.

Together, on Thursday, we ticked off a menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner for Friday 18th.

I marvelled at her appetite. Yes, please, she had said, stewed fruit and orange juice and Weetbix ... I’d like the beef please, Fran.

And I’ll have coffee with that ... (she slept between responses).

Anyway, I saw that she was not in pain, set off for Sydney, reassuring her that Bob would be there on Friday, me and Mark on Saturday, and her old friend Nance as well.

On Friday, she had “a good breakfast” and then as they say “slipped away”.

She was not able to be roused and so she died a little later that day.

Peaceful and optimistic while awake.

So, her funeral is on Friday, July 25. There is to be a small gathering at the Moruya cemetery at 2 pm and then a larger gathering at the Moruya Waterfront Hotel Motel Function room, at 3 pm. (North side of the bridge.) Love and fond memories to you all,

xxx Fran

I and Coral and many members of the extended family and friends travelled to Moruya to attend Cec's funeral, which was very moving. Several of us gave tributes to Cec at the cemetery and at the funeral gathering in town. It was very sad, but also a celebration of her life as a kind and humane person. A letter from Fran provided a brief chronology of Cec's life:

- 1920: Born at Dyamberin, Guyra Shire, NSW (see family tree, from Owen Wright: *Wongwibinda*)
Father Cecil Wright, Mother Madeleine (Delpratt) Wright.
Happy “barefoot” & horse-powered childhood.
- 1936 to 1943 Sydney, Elizabeth Bay and Kirribilli, study, firstly at secretarial school, then graduated from Sydney University with Diploma of Social Work.
Bohemian with seriousness days: Judith Wright and Liza DeBurgh. Worked with Red Cross as Home Visitor.
Visited families in inner suburbs of Sydney: Paddington, Newtown, Redfern.
Student at Uni during Margaret Whitlam (to-be) time.
- 1944/5: Married Ian Clement McIlroy in Brisbane. Moved to bayside Parkdale in Melbourne, Victoria.
- 1946: James Ian born.
- 1948: Fiona Jill born.
- 1951: Robert Andrew born.
- 1953: Frances Anne born.
- 1956: Moved to Mt Eliza, to newly built southern bayside Melbourne house.
Designed by “cousin-in-law” Karl Feller.
- 1957 and 1958: Travelled with Ian to central Australia, also to Europe, Israel and Russia. Children stayed with Wrights (and Feller) families. Yay cousins! Fran with Pat and Brud, (really Maurice), Bob with Tina and Peter, and Fiona with Owen and Margo and Jim with Karl and Betty.

- 1959: Worked as qualified Social Worker with Catholic Welfare organisation. The nun working with her was formerly the Aboriginal actress who played Jedda in film of same name.
- 1964: Travelled to USA with family, to University at Tempe, Arizona and UCLA, Davis, California.
- 1965: Worked as fulltime Social Worker with Melbourne Psychiatric Hospital
- 1967: Travelled with family to Egypt and Britain. The Middle East 6 Day War erupted and our family parted, to Australia, Egypt and Britain. Jim was a graduate student by then, Fi was an Undergraduate at Cairo Uni and Bob and I attended Cairo American College.
- 1968: Worked with Psychology and Guidance Branch of Vic State Education Dept.
- 1972: Travelled with Fran and Ian to Italy, Britain, Bulgaria and Europe.
- 1974: Separated from Ian, divorced by 1976. Moved to Cabanandra, East Gippsland, Vic.
Grandparenting and potter passion.
Commenced relationship with Gray Smith, artist.
- 1990: Moved to Tuross Head, NSW South Coast.
Volunteer on Refuge Committee and Reconciliation group. Keen University of 3rd Age student.
Heart condition showed up. Triple bypass in 1996.
- 2003: Moved to Banksia Village.
- 2008: Died Moruya Hospital, Buried Moruya Cemetery.

Here is my account of Cec's funeral.

May Cecily McIlroy (born May 11, 1920, died July 18, 2008)

Cec, as her loving family knew her, passed away in Moruya Hospital after a period of declining health. Her funeral at Moruya Cemetery on Friday July 25 was a sad but uplifting experience. Almost 50 people attended the ceremony to mourn her passing and to celebrate her life.

Her eldest son Jim opened the proceedings with a short summary of events in her life, and welcomed everyone from near and far. Close and extended family members attended from Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and elsewhere. And friends and acquaintances of Cec's came from Banksia Retirement Village, where Cec spent the last five years of her life, in nearby Broulee, and from other parts of the region around Moruya.

Dez Byron, gave a moving tribute to Cec on behalf of Auntie Coop (Georgina

Parsons), from the local Koori people of the area: “The NSW Reconciliation Group of Art Central would like to acknowledge a very dear lady and to show our respect to a great person.

“Cec must have seen many changes in her lifetime and the people that met her said what a great woman she was. She loved all people no matter who they were, where they came from or what colour they are.

“It would have been an honour to have met you, Cec. Rest in peace. God bless you and may your family know that our reconciliation people are thinking of you in your sorrow and grief.”

Auntie Coop was unable to attend due to a prior engagement, but it was heartening to receive her acknowledgement of Cec’s longstanding commitment to the Aboriginal Reconciliation movement in the area.

Then Cecily’s three other children, Fiona, Bob and Fran, spoke, declaring their love and care for their warm-hearted mother. Fran said: “Firstly, I would like to reassure everyone that Cec died in a mood of ease and with a quality of ‘expectation’ of life ...

“She had big ideals for the world: care for our planet, care for each other and progress in enhanced harmony — for peace on earth, with justice. These ideals, I’m sure, are shared by us all — and we’ll carry them through in our ways. As Cec would say: ‘You’ll work it out.’ And we will.”

After the immediate family, other people spoke briefly of their respect and care for Cecily, in different aspects of her life. Bill, from the University of the 3rd Age (U3A), told the story of Cec pulling him up sharply after he had wrongly disparaged Dorothy Wordsworth (wife of the famous poet William Wordsworth), during a talk Cec had attended on the romantic English poets of the 19th century.

Cecily was a strong feminist, ahead of her time in her support for women’s rights, from the early 1960s onwards. This was confirmed when Carol from the Moruya Women’s Refuge stressed that if it hadn’t been for the support of Cecily and her friends on the management committee, in the initial stages, the local refuge “would have folded long ago.” The “Cecily McIlroy Memorial Choir” sang “Bread and Roses” to celebrate Cec’s commitment to women’s issues.

Venie Holmgren, one of Cecily’s “longstanding friends”, stressed the importance to her of Cec’s companionship over many years. Nance Meyer, another close friend of Cecily’s, confirmed how much she valued the times she spent with Cec, and that her spirit would live on with her.

Meredith McKinney, the daughter of Cec’s cousin, Australia’s foremost poet Judith Wright, declared that “Cec was a very formative person for Judith. This is now a moving on of generations, but also a beginning as well as an end of an era.”

Following a minute's silence for everyone to remember what Cecily meant to them, the coffin was lowered and those present filed past to drop a banksia flower into the grave. Friends and family also signed a condolence book for Cecily.

People then adjourned to the Waterfront Hotel-Motel function room, on the banks of the Moruya River, for a reception/wake for Cec. There we viewed a beautiful short film made by one of Cec's grandchildren, Katrina Channells, based on an interview with Cec made just two weeks before her death.

Apologies were noted from a number of family members and friends who were unable to attend the funeral for various reasons.

Then a number of other attendees spoke briefly of their thoughts and feelings about Cecily. Philippa Rowland, daughter of another of Cec's cousins, said, "I feel so much the richer for having, fairly recently, met Cec and the McIlroy family."

An old friend of Cec's Helen Dell, said that she had first met the McIlroy family in Aspendale, Melbourne, many years ago. Helen was "very grateful to Cecily" for her support and friendship at a time when she needed that assistance.

Ann Neale, sister of Cec's cousin Alison, showed a historic photo of Cec's parents' wedding years ago, and emphasised the ties between the various wings of the Wright-Delpratt families.

Deb Foskey (former partner of Bob McIlroy) spoke movingly of her relationship with Cecily, which began during their time spent together at the rural farm community of Cabanandra, in East Gippsland, Victoria. Deb's daughter Samara, Cec's eldest granddaughter, also spoke of her admiration for Cec's independence of spirit and her example of how one can live a life with integrity.

Others also contributed during a moving and heart-warming afternoon of appreciation for the life of a woman who touched many people, and whose caring and humane spirit continues in the memories of so many.

The "Cecily McIlroy Memorial Choir" re-formed to sing an African and a Pitjanjatjara song, and closed the evening with "Keep On Walking Forward".

Political work continues

In August 2008, I was requested to travel over to Perth to assist with some organisational problems the Perth branch was having. I stayed with comrades Sam Wainwright and Janet Parker near Fremantle.

I remember having a great time there, including selling *GLW* outside the central station. I also attended a union picket at a factory in the suburb of Canningvale:

The following is my article in *GLW* about the action:

AMCOR workers campaign for a new agreement by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, August 23, 2008

PERTH — Workers at the AMCOR factory in the suburb of Canningvale protested on August 19 to support their campaign for wage rises and a new enterprise agreement. The plant, which manufactures steel cans, had been assessed as one of the most productive in the world but now faces decline because of management intransigence, workers told *Green Left Weekly* outside the factory gates.

The workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, have rejected management's latest offer. "The company has offered 5.5% per year, but they want to close down our longstanding performance/incentive scheme and take away other conditions", said one striking worker. "We've always had a union EBA here and that will continue. This bargaining process started back in January and we've had enough", another worker added.

One of the banners displayed outside the factory said, "Feed family, Pay mortgage, Buy fuel, No can do!". The AMCOR workers are considering further action.

In mid-September 2008, back in Brisbane, we held another public forum at the Activist Centre on the campaign to abolish the ABCC (Australian Building and Construction Commission):

From Clarrie O'Shea to the ABCC — the struggle for union rights by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, October 11, 2008

The campaign against the jailing of tramways union leader Clarrie O'Shea, in Melbourne in May 1969, for refusing to pay fines imposed under the infamous anti-union penal powers of the time is rich with lessons for today's campaign against the Australian Building and Construction Commission's (ABCC) witch hunt of construction unionists.

The historic fight for union rights in Australia was part of the popular struggle for democratic rights in colonial times during the 19th century. From the Eureka Stockade to the 1890s shearers' strikes, the campaign to build the Australian workers' movement won ground-breaking gains in the international arena.

During the 20th century, a series of major industrial battles established strong union organisation across Australia. But from the start, the legal right to strike was restricted. During the 1960s, the imposition of the anti-union penal powers increased to the point at which an all-out confrontation was inevitable.

"Historic strike wave defies penal system: the long struggle of Australia's organised workers against insidious arbitration laws devised to steal away their only truly defensive

weapon — the strike — has exploded into unprecedented, nationwide direct action”, reported the May 21, 1969, issue of *Tribune*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Australia.

One million workers stopped work around the country to demand “Free Clarrie O’Shea and repeal the penal powers”. On May 15, the day O’Shea was jailed, 5000 workers marched through the streets of Melbourne, and surrounded the Arbitration Court building.

The confrontation so shocked the ruling class that an “anonymous benefactor” paid O’Shea’s \$8000 fines, and the union leader was released, to head off further class polarisation. While the penal powers were not repealed, they were never used again.

This struggle has clear lessons for the current campaigns against the ABCC, and in solidarity with construction union official Noel Washington, who faces jail for refusing to testify to this new industrial police force.

Years of preparation by the militant unions, especially in Victoria, preceded the mobilisation in support of O’Shea in the 1960s. A widespread education campaign among the union membership was linked to a gradual escalation of industrial action against the penal powers.

A similar strategy of education, plus increasing political and industrial action, will be required to prevent the conviction of Washington and force the Rudd Labor government to completely abolish the ABCC.

The principle of solidarity among the whole union movement, encapsulated in the slogan “An injury to one is an injury to all”, is essential to win this campaign.

Washington represents a vital test case for union rights under the Labor government. It is crucial to win this campaign as part of a broader struggle to repeal all of Howard’s Work Choices legislation, and defend the right of unions to organised freely in this country.

[Jim McIlroy is a member of the Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance. This article is based on a presentation he gave to a September 17 Brisbane forum organised by the Socialist Alliance.]

Launch of our Venezuela book

Then, in October 2008, I went on a national tour to help launch the new book by Coral and myself, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, which had recently been published by Resistance Books. We need to thank Lisa Macdonald for her painstaking work in editing the volume:

Voices from Venezuela book launched by Bill Mason, Wollongong, *Green Left Weekly*, October 11, 2008

"It is important that this book is being released at this time. It allows us to better understand the reality of the Venezuelan revolution", Nelson Davila, Venezuelan Charge d'affaires, told a meeting in Wollongong on October 4. Davila was launching *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, a new book by *Green Left Weekly* correspondents Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter.

The book is based on interviews with participants in the revolutionary upheaval which is sweeping Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America, conducted in Venezuela in 2006. *Voices from Venezuela* aims to communicate the spirit of the grassroots popular movement led by socialist President Hugo Chavez.

The launch was one of a number taking place in cities in recent weeks, attracting audiences of 50 in Brisbane, 40 in Sydney, 50 in Canberra, 20 in Wollongong and 30 in Melbourne. The launches were co-sponsored by publisher Resistance Books, the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) and Nelson Davila.

"This book is part of the solidarity effort we can see developing around the world with Venezuela, as one way of communicating directly with the people of Australia and elsewhere in the English-speaking countries," Davila told the Wollongong audience.

Helping to launch the book in Melbourne on October 8, former Victorian Electrical Trades Union organiser and AVSN May Day Brigade co-ordinator John Cleary said *Voices from Venezuela* "tells stories of popular struggle, stories of building socialism of the 21st century. For the Venezuelan people to win, it requires us to support their struggle. This book assists us to build the solidarity movement."

Speaking at the Brisbane launch on September 26, AVSN activist Marg Gleeson said, "Reading the book gives you a real feel for what it is like to be on a Venezuela solidarity brigade, the wonderful activists, community leaders, workers and students whom we have the great joy of spending time with. It is very important that these voices of the revolution be documented in English and readily accessible."

Wynter presented a slideshow of photos to illustrate the background to the book at several of the launches. McIlroy explained that in the context of an international capitalist financial crisis, Venezuela's example of the use of government resources to provide better health, education and other social needs for the population provided inspiration.

The book seeks to show that the revolutionary process is backed by a popular democracy, which helps to drive social change forward in the face of bureaucratic and political challenges, nationally and internationally.

The book is available from Resistance Bookshops, or can be purchased online at <http://www.resistancebooks.com>.

A positive review of the book was published in *GLW* in late October, written by our old friend and comrade Dick Nichols:

Venezuela: The inspiring voices of an awakening people by Dick Nichols, *Green Left Weekly*, October 24, 2008

Why should Australian working people take any notice of far-off, Spanish-speaking, oil-exporting, baseball-playing Venezuela?

Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy's book *Voices from Venezuela* tells us why, and does it in the best possible way — by handing a microphone to a wide range of Venezuelans, participants in the excitement, stress and strain of the “Bolivarian revolution” that began in 1998 with the election as president of former paratrooper Hugo Chavez Frias.

The enormous value of the book is that it provides an English-speaking readership with the lived experience of Venezuela's roller coaster of a revolution in the straightforward words of those who are making it.

The reader will learn many things, but probably the first lesson that strikes home is that the Bolivarian revolution is very much the product of Venezuela's peculiar history.

For example, the revolution didn't develop its strength as a movement against dictatorship (as in Cuba). The Venezuelan people threw out their last dictatorship back in 1958, when torturer Marcos Perez Jimenez fell after a month of protests ending in a general strike.

Bolivarian revolution

The Bolivarian revolution emerged as a protest movement against the corrupt two-party oligarchy that was set up, with US blessing, to replace Perez Jimenez.

Over 40 years, Christian Democrat and Social Democrat administrations alternated, often posing as friends of revolution in other Latin American countries, but letting the obscenely wealthy Venezuelan elite send at least \$100 billion abroad while millions of their compatriots starved, died of preventable diseases and remained mired in illiteracy and ignorance.

The beginning of the end of this “Fourth Republic” was the 1989 uprising of the people of Caracas against IMF-imposed price increases on basic necessities. This led to a failed 1992 coup by Chavez, and to the last-ditch “progressive” presidency of one-time Christian Democrat president Rafael Caldera, who created a new political movement allied with the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) and the Movement

Towards Socialism (MAS).

Mass disappointment with Caldera's 1994-1998 rule prepared the ground for the emergence of Chavez's successful Movement for the Fifth Republic and the adoption in 1999 of the new, radically progressive, constitution of the "Fifth Republic".

The reader of *Voices from Venezuela* will learn what this constitution means for the Venezuelan masses. In the words of Dr Marcelo Alfonso, director of the Institute of Experimental Medicine at the Central University of Venezuela: "Yesterday, someone asked me, 'What is the best move that Chavez ever made?'. I said the new constitution of 1999, because in order to make a new society, you need a new political instrument and a new ideology. The constitution is a new base: everything that has changed has come via that constitution."

Which leads straight to the second lesson that the reader will draw from reading *Voices from Venezuela*. The Bolivarian revolution has developed in a strictly constitutional way, acquiring and reinforcing its legitimacy — and delegitimising its enemies — through winning majorities at fair elections and referenda.

In the one case where a Chavez proposal has failed to win support — the December 2007 referendum on amendments that would have changed the constitution into a socialist magna carta — Chavez accepted the decision, drawing the lesson that a lot remained to be done to win people to the revolution's now openly socialist objective.

Voices from Venezuela devotes a specific section to this aspect, but it also permeates the comments of many of the book's interviewees, reflecting the underlying reality that the Bolivarian revolution is a permanent struggle for hearts and minds in a country where the economic power of the capitalist class has yet to be broken.

The third strength of *Voices from Venezuela* is that it imparts the deeply human content of the revolution. No one who finishes the book will be in any doubt as to why it enjoys and builds on mass popular support.

Missions

In one sense its motor force is simple — since 1998 the country's oil wealth has increasingly been directed to improving the lives of the mass of the people, beginning with the poorest, the most marginalised and most remote. This has been achieved by creating a network of "missions" parallel to and in action against the bloated, corrupt, lazy and incompetent state apparatus inherited from the Fourth Republic.

The missions, staffed by the revolution's most enthusiastic supporters and, in the case of health, by Cuban volunteer doctors and nurses, have succeeded in eliminating illiteracy, installed new health care centres in thousands of townships and villages, equipping hundreds and thousands of people with useful skills and education, providing food and other essentials at big discounts to the poorest, and created the first ever

services to the homeless, drug addicts and the mentally ill.

How this immense job was done comes through in a moving interview with the son of Dr Gilberto Rodrigues Ochoa, the first health minister of the Chavez government. According to Andres Eloy Rodrigues Ochoa: “At the start [my father] had to confront the disaster that was the health ministry and the disaster that was the health system.

“Barrio Adentro [‘Into the Neighbourhood’, the basic public health mission] was born from an idea of my father’s. He called it ‘integral medicine’, but it was part of the plan to decentralise and remove the overcrowding from hospitals. This was the only way you could properly use the hospitals’ resources ... The majority of patients could be treated in community consulting rooms.

“With the overcrowding of the hospitals there are now centres of integrated diagnosis, where all treatment is free and of the highest quality. This is all part of the public health system, so people don’t have to pay for something my father considered a fundamental right for everyone and a responsibility of the state. This right is now recognised in the Bolivarian constitution.”

But redistribution of oil income from the wealthy to social need is not socialism. However, the steps the Bolivarian revolution has already taken in increasing social justice for the Venezuelan people has set up a permanent conflict with the capitalist class. Up until now this has been softened by the high price of oil and the booming economy, which has enabled the rich to stay rich even as the Venezuelan state has increasingly been removed from their control.

But a showdown will come sooner or later, not only because socialism is the avowed goal of the revolution, but also because the social spending and other development plans of the Chavez government will at a certain point require increasing control of the “commanding heights” of the economy, in particular the finance sector. (A straw in the wind is the recent nationalisation of the Bank of Venezuela, local affiliate of the Spanish Santander banking group.)

This need to “make despotic inroads into the rights of property”, as the *Communist Manifesto* puts it, demands that the self-organisation of the working people and poor that *Voices from Venezuela* details so well must reach new heights. After all, these “despotic inroads” can only be the work of the mass of the working class, peasantry and urban poor, becoming conscious from their own lives of their vocation for socialism.

Nationalisation

The fourth strength of *Voices from Venezuela* is that it vividly charts the strengths and weaknesses of these forces for socialist transformation of Venezuela.

The reader will learn of the still difficult situation of organised labour, which has shed the old bureaucratic straitjacket of the Confederation of Workers of Venezuela

without yet managing to build a strong and unified replacement intent on helping the workers organise to advance the revolution.

The book also tells of the creativity and determination that sections of the working class, shown in the creation of co-operatives and in forcing the recent nationalisation of the country's biggest steel plant, Sidor. The generalisation of that creativity will be critical to the revolution's advance.

Other chapters deal with the struggles and gains of women, students and the country's indigenous peoples — the other forces most committed to socialist transformation.

Today, two years after Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter returned to Australia, the Venezuelan revolution continues to advance in its inimitable and nerve-wracking zig-zag way. As Chavez himself has often said, the Bolivarian revolution has made its biggest advances by having to mobilise to defeat the counter-revolution — against a coup in 2002, a lock-out by the state oil company bosses in 2002-03 and a recall referendum against Chavez in 2004.

Readers of *Voices from Venezuela* will grasp this dynamic and come away inspired with the importance of the Bolivarian revolution as a uniquely Venezuelan expression of a global need — to throw off the shackles of an obsolete capitalism and begin the building of a human-centred, just and sustainable society.

As such, it will also help readers strengthen their commitment to the struggle for socialism in our very different, but not so different, Australia.

Return to Venezuela

Finally, Coral and I set off to Caracas again in November to prepare for the 2008 AVSN Solidarity Brigade to Venezuela, followed by some further travels to Cuba and Central America. We reported in GLW:

Venezuela: Solidarity brigade sees revolution in action by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, *Green Left Weekly*, November 29, 2008

The November 2008 Venezuela solidarity brigade organised by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) spent its first days meeting community activists and hearing reports on the progress of the Bolivarian revolution.

On November 20, the 30 *brigadistas* from Australia, Canada and New Zealand heard talks from *Green Left Weekly* journalist and researcher at the Miranda International Centre (CIM) Federico Fuentes, as well as Professor Marcelo Alfonso, the head of the

Institute of Experimental Medicine at the Central University of Caracas.

The following day, the brigadistas visited the Endogenous Development Zone in the impoverished suburb of Catia, including tours of a shoe-making cooperative, a T-shirt coop, a hospital clinic of the Barrio Adentro medical program, and an organic garden.

The brigade has also toured the historic revolutionary Barrio January 23, where members viewed a Barrio Adentro primary care clinic, the Che Guevara community centre and the Simon Bolivar Co-ordination complex — which includes the local radio station, Voice of Barrio Enero 23, and branches of Mission Robinson primary education program and Mission Science.

On November 23, the brigade formed into three teams to observe the elections for governors and municipal mayors in several neighbourhoods of Caracas. Team members were escorted by United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) militants to a number of electoral booths.

They were able to talk to the voters lining up to enter the booths, noting the festival-like atmosphere prevailing in these areas. The brigadistas were also permitted to enter the polling stations and observe the highly advanced, computerised voting system that Venezuela uses.

The following day, the brigade divided into two groups to visit the regional centres of Merida and Valencia.

The two sub-groups will visit social missions, communal councils, cooperatives, local newspaper offices and talk to community leaders and trade union activists.

The brigade will finish with a closing discussion session, and an additional day involving a visit to the Ochoa Rodriguez Children's Heart Hospital.

After the brigade, Coral and I spent some time visiting people in Venezuela, and spent a pleasant Christmas celebration with our host family, Luis and Claret, and their two children. We attended a christening ceremony at a church in the barrio on the hillside above Catia, where we were staying.

Earlier, on December 9, we sent a "Postcard from Caracas" to people at home, updating them on our movements since we left Australia:

Dear friends and comrades,

This is the first chance we have had to write a Postcard from Caracas, as we have been very busy with helping to prepare and carry out the Nov 2008 Australia Venezuela Solidarity Network AVSN Brigade here, from Nov 20 to Dec 1. Overall, the brigade was very successful, with more than 30 Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians visiting barrios, health and education social missions, cooperatives, union offices, hospitals and communal councils.

We were able to speak to activists and leaders of the popular movements which are the motor force of the Bolivarian Revolution, which is changing the face of Venezuela, and inspiring revolutionary movements across Latin America. We observed the Nov 23 gubernatorial and mayoral elections, visiting polling booths in several communities of Caracas, and seeing Venezuela's deeply democratic system in operation.

For more information on this and other brigades, and other material on AVSN solidarity work, visit www.venezuelasolidarity.org

The election results were an overall victory for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which is the new party bringing together the bulk of the forces supporting President Hugo Chavez' revolution for Socialism of the 21st Century in Venezuela. The PSUV won 17 out of 23 state governorships and 80% of the mayors of the cities and towns. However, several setbacks were suffered, with the loss to the right wing opposition of the mayor of Greater Caracas, the states of Miranda, Carabobo and Tachira, and retention by the opposition of the crucial oil rich state of Zulia.

These losses reflect continuing problems of bureaucracy and corruption within the Chavista movement, and represent a challenge to the revolution to seriously tackle these issues, and to build and deepen the popular base of the PSUV and the other people's organisations in future. President Chavez has confronted this challenge to the revolution by throwing down the gauntlet to the right wing, authorising the launch of a referendum in February 2009 to change the constitution to permit him to stand again for re-election as president in 2012. Currently, a president is limited to two terms of office only.

The leadership of Chavez is vital to the revolution at this stage of its development. We expect to see a serious battle against the opposition in coming months leading up to the referendum, with the formation of a new mission, Mission Guevara, to help mobilise the population to support the Yes vote.

On December 6, we attended a mass rally of hundreds of thousands of Chavistas near Miraflores Presidential Palace to hear Chavez commence the campaign for the constitutional amendment. The red T-shirted crowd chanted Uh, Ah! Chavez no se va! (Uh, Ah! Chavez will not go!), to express their support for the continuation in office of the president who had led the Bolivarian Revolution as president for 10 years since he first won office in 1998.

Personally, we are living in the barrio of Catia in the west of Caracas, with the same family we shared with in 2006 when we spent a year living here. The people are as friendly as ever, and while inflation is a serious problem in Venezuela, the social conditions of the poor and workers have improved gradually over the years, especially with the impact of the social missions in lifting the educational and health standards of

the majority.

We plan to travel to Cuba for two weeks at the end of December, and then travel from Mexico, through Guatemala to El Salvador for the presidential elections on March 15 next year, returning to Caracas for a short time after that, before heading home to Australia at the end of March.

That's all for now. More later,

Best regards and solidarity,

Jim and Coral.

Tour of Cuba with ICAP

Then, immediately after Christmas, we flew to Cuba to do a tour organised by ICAP (the International Committee for Friendship with the Peoples). We celebrated January 1, the anniversary of the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, in Havana.

Below is a report we prepared about the tour organised by ICAP for us, which gave us a deeper insight into the Cuban Revolution, and the dedication of the Cuban people:

Report on program of meetings organised by Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), January 5 to 9, 2009, for a delegation from the Australian Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP)

Jim McIlroy, President of the DSP (jimmcil@gmail.com) & Coral Wynter, longstanding member of the DSP (cvawynter@gmail.com).

The program of activities was organised for the DSP representatives, following discussions between the DSP National Office and the Cuban Consul in Sydney, by ICAP and Amistur, during a two-week visit to Cuba by Coral and Jim to coincide with the 50th anniversary celebrations for the victory of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959. Following is a summary of the main activities of the program:

Mon, Jan 5: In the morning, we joined members of the Australian Southern Cross Brigade, in Cuba from December 27, 2008, to January 21, 2009, at Friendship House, Vedado, Havana, for a welcome by the president of ICAP, Jorge Marti, who spoke about the importance of international solidarity for the Cuban revolution, and the significance of the achievement of 50 years of building socialism in Cuba in the face of the US imperialist blockade.

In the afternoon, Professor of History, Rolando Lopez del Amor, gave a

comprehensive account of the history of US intervention into Cuban affairs, going back to the early years of the 19th century. He stressed that the last 50 years of the US blockade, following the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, was only the latest of US government attempts to dominate Cuba.

The modern history of Cuba was an ongoing struggle against Spanish colonialism and then US imperialism. That 200 year fight for independence and social development continues today, as Cuba enters the second 50 years of socialist construction.

Asked about the possibility of an improvement in relations with the US under newly elected President Barack Obama, Professor Lopez replied: "We are ready for anything, whether things do change or nothing changes. But we accept no conditions!"
Tues, Jan 6: Visit to the office of the Municipal Assembly of People's Power, Playa region, City of Havana, accompanied by Malaika Peguero, representative of the International Relations Department of the Provincial Assembly of People's Power, Havana City. Roberto Alejandro Cardenal Santos, Vice-President of the Municipal Assembly of Playa, outlined the structure and functions of the municipal assemblies of popular power.

He noted that there were 15 municipalities in the city of Havana, with delegates elected from each neighbourhood within a municipality. The role of the municipal assemblies is to look after issues and problems in their area, including lighting, gas and electricity facilities, roads and footpaths.

Inette Almeida Garcia, secretary of the administrative council of Playa Municipal Assembly, went on to discuss various aspects of the work of the people's power assemblies, including the major issue of housing. She also talked about the drastic effects of the recent hurricanes on housing, electricity infrastructure and agriculture in Cuba, most recently in the province of Pinar del Rio. She has direct experience in organising and planning evacuations in the case of hurricane alerts.

In the afternoon, we met with Abelardo Cueto Sosa, representative for the Asia and Oceania area of the Department of International Relations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). The meeting heard a report on the left political situation in Australia, and the work and perspectives of the DSP. We agreed to further pursue mutual relations and strengthen solidarity campaigns to oppose the US blockade of Cuba and to free the Five Cuban Heroes.

Wed, Jan 7: Visit to the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), on the coast west of Havana. Lourdes Castellanos, Vice-Director for International Relations for ELAM, spoke about the founding of the school in 1999, following the sending of Cuban medical brigades to countries of Central America badly affected by hurricanes in 1998, and the obvious need of many Latin American countries for more trained

young doctors.

Courses at ELAM for young Latin Americans are totally free, paid by the Cuban government. Some 6500 students have graduated as doctors so far, coming from all the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and even the USA.

The courses are accredited by the World Health Organisation. "Returned medical graduates from ELAM have a tremendous effect in their home countries," Castellanos said. They are trained to use both advanced medical technology and to work without technology, if it is not available at home, she added.

That afternoon, we met with Dania Rodriguez, representative for International Relations for the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC), at the FMC headquarters in Vedado, Havana. The FMC was preparing for its 8th National Congress at that time.

Before the Revolution, Dania told us, there were various women's groups, but after 1959 they united into one organisation. The FMC has 4 million members, with any Cuban woman over 14 years old able to join.

The FMC has 76,000 branches around the country, with three levels of organisation: local, provincial and national. The organisation is self-financing, receiving no direct government funding, and classed as an NGO, she said.

The FMC deals with social issues, children, the elderly, and does considerable work promoting public health campaigns for women. It has orientation houses to provide specialised professional assistance to women.

Machismo is still a problem in Cuba, Dania explained. The FMC works with women and men to change behaviour, which has developed over a long time. But women have made enormous advances since the Revolution, including in the workforce and with maternal and paternal childcare leave, which provides for 12 months paid leave for either parent around the time of childbirth.

Thurs, Jan 8: That morning, we visited the national office of the Committees for Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), again in the inner Havana suburb of Vedado. There we heard reports from Jose Manuel Garcia, Chief of International Relations for the CDRs, and Jose Carlos, official of the International Office of the CDRs.

The CDRs were formed in September 1960, born out of the Revolution's response to the attacks launched on Cuba by the US government. They are the largest organisation of the people in Cuba, and are self-financing, funded by the membership, Garcia and Carlos told us.

Today, the great majority of the population are in the CDRs, with 8,400,000 members. Anyone who wants to defend the country can be a member. To join you don't have to be a PCC member, they explained.

There are 136,000 CDR neighbourhood groups around the country, which are

organised into zones. Representatives are elected by the CDR groups to the leadership of the zones. There are also activists who assist with the organisation of the CDR groups and the work of the zones.

The national leadership of the CDRs is elected every five years. There are also schools to train people to be professional workers for the CDR organisation at various levels, they said.

The role of the CDRs today is to defend the Revolution at the level of the barrios, but through social influence, not with arms, Garcia and Carlos pointed out. The CDRs play an important part in tackling social problems, especially through talking to families, and through education.

In the afternoon, we had a meeting with Jorge Gonzalez Corona, assessor for the Ministry of Education (MINED) at a ministry office near the Malecon, again in the suburb of Vedado. Corona began by outlining the deplorable situation of the education system in Cuba before the Revolution.

Out of a population of around 6 million at the time, some one million were totally illiterate. Fifty per cent of children were not attending school.

After the Revolution, the first task was to create schools for all the children, using houses for classrooms. At the same time, 200,000 secondary students became teachers in the historic literacy campaign which taught 800,000 Cubans to read within a short period.

A huge education program was launched in the country. Between 1970 and 1980, more than 2000 new schools were built, mainly in the countryside.

Today, of a population of 11 million, 3.5 million are studying. In 1960, there were only three universities; now there is a network of 65 universities across the country. Tertiary education is free and available to all.

"Now, we are working hard on the quality of our education system," Corona said. "Cuba shows that if you utilise human capital, with the values of social justice and peace, you can achieve a lot with few resources. In a crisis, human beings are capable of miracles," he said.

Fri, Jan 9: On Friday morning, we travelled out to the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp (CIJAM), at Caimito, Havana Province, 45 km from Havana City, to join the Southern Cross Brigade to hear a presentation from families of the Five Cuban Heroes, unjustly imprisoned in the US. Three mothers of the Five gave inspiring accounts of the campaign to free their sons, who were convicted on trumped up charges of conspiracy as part of the US government's campaign against socialist Cuba.

They noted that the next legal campaign is to have the prisoners' appeal heard by the US Supreme Court. A huge international effort is now required to publicise the case

and pressure the court to reverse this blatant travesty of justice.

In discussion, a number of speakers reported on the campaign in Britain, Australia and elsewhere to free the Cuban Five. The courage and determination of the mothers makes it all the more important to build this movement more strongly than ever.

In the afternoon, we went with the Australian Brigadistas to the offices of the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC), in Central Havana, to hear a report from leaders of the trade union movement about the work of the CTC. The presentation was introduced by Gilda Chacon, from the Department of International Relations of the CTC.

The report noted that the CTC was celebrating its 70th anniversary in February this year. The CTC was founded well before the victory of the Revolution to fight for the rights of Cuban workers.

There are now 19 union federations in the CTC, with positions within the national body based on elections in workplaces. The CTC continues its role of working to improve the conditions of the working class.

There is now a special situation in Cuba, with the impact of three hurricanes and the need to rebuild housing and infrastructure. There is also the need to increase wages and salaries with the improvement of the Cuban economy after the crisis of the Special Period.

The Cuban union movement has a duty to defend the socialist system of the country, in the face of continuing attacks by US imperialism. And the workers' movement has another mission: solidarity with all the workers of the world in a period of crisis, the report noted.

Our final meeting, late that afternoon, was with the Union of Communist Youth (UJC), at the Anti-Imperialist Tribune, in front of the US Special Interests Section on the Malecon, Vedado. Tirso Ivanio Penoranda Basail, member of the National Committee of the UJC, explained that the UJC was formed by Che Guevara in April 1960, in a historic development from the Association of Rebel Youth.

The UJC is a voluntary organisation of youth, based on Che's call to be in the vanguard, as the best of the young students and youth. Members are between 15 and 29 years of age, committed to defend the Revolution, and aiming to join the Cuban Communist Party.

The UJC now has 600,000 members, with 50,000 branches, provincial committees in all 14 provinces, and a national committee of 300. Popular committees are organised in schools and workplaces, with meetings at least once a month, including leadership reports on campaigns and an educational discussion.

The role of the UJC is to promote socialist values and principles, and to cultivate

solidarity and equality among the youth. The UJC also tackles issues affecting youth, to ensure that all young people are involved in work or study.

The UJC also works with the Jose Marti Pioneers, for children 5 to 14 years old, the Federation of Students (FEEM) for middle school aged youth, and the Federation of University Students (FEU). The three organisations are autonomous, but leadership is provided by the UJC.

Enrique Lanza Herena, Director of the Anti-Imperialist Tribune Jose Marti then explained that a major international meeting of the Anti-Imperialist Front was planned to occur in Havana on April 29-30. Organisers expect 2000 representatives from around the world to attend, to protest the jailing of the Cuban Five and demand their release.

In conclusion, the program of meetings we attended from January 5-9 were most informative and interesting, and gave us a better understanding of the history and achievements of the Cuban Revolution. We wish to thank the representatives of ICAP, Rigoberto Zarza, Odalys Lopez, Adria Espinosa, Maribel and others, as well as Tania Fernandez from Amistur, for their hospitality and assistance.

After the ICAP tour, we attended a major rally to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the victory of the Cuban Revolution. We wrote about it below:

Cuba celebrates 50 years of revolution by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, Havana, Cuba, *Green Left Weekly*, January 17, 2009

Citizens across Cuba have thronged the streets of cities and towns to welcome the “Caravan of Liberty”, a convoy of trucks and buses retracing the path of Fidel Castro and the victorious fighters of the Rebel Army, after the declaration of the defeat of the Batista dictatorship on January 1, 1959.

The caravan commenced in Santiago de Cuba, on the far south-eastern coast of the country on January 1 and finished in the capital, Havana, on the north-western coast on January 8.

Participants in the Caravan of Liberty included veterans of the original Rebel Army, which fought and defeated the military regime of US-backed tyrant Fulgencia Batista 50 years ago and launched the Cuban socialist revolution.

The caravan arrived in Havana on January 8, just as Fidel’s original convoy had done in 1959, and traversed the city to the welcome of cheering crowds.

The caravan ended with an “Act of the City of Havana for the entry of Fidel and the Caravan of Liberty into the capital of the country ... ending in Liberty City, otherwise known as the Camp of Columbia, where the Commander in Chief proclaimed, on January 8, 1959, the end of the dictatorship and the commitment of the Revolution

to never defraud our people in the difficult road that they had now initiated”, *Granma* reported on January 9.

The main official meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the victory of the revolution took place on January 1 in Santiago de Cuba, where President Raul Castro delivered a speech before some 3000 people.

“The celebration began with the famous expression of Fidel, ‘Finally, we have arrived in Santiago!’” the January 2 *Granma* reported.

On the night of January 1 the 50th anniversary was celebrated with a big concert in Havana, before tens of thousands of Cuban youth, at the Anti-Imperialist Tribune in front of the US Special Interests Section, on the Malecon.

Other smaller events were held around the country, as Cubans prepare to mark a year of activities denoting their historic victory.

We stayed in Havana in the flat owned by our friend Efrain’s mother, and spent a lot of time walking around the city, especially the beautiful Old Havana area, which had been restored with the assistance of UNESCO. Old Havana is one of the iconic Spanish-style cultural areas of Latin America, and is now a tourist mecca.

We also took a trip to the Bay of Pigs region, where we stayed in a casa particular and had a great time, including a swim in the Caribbean.

On the way back to Havana, we experienced a contradiction of the Cuban situation. We waited for a bus back to the city, but were refused entry to a local bus because we were foreigners and could only pay in special peso currency.

Eventually, we were picked up by a taxi, and were a bit concerned when he drove off the highway into a darkened village where he stopped to get petrol. It all turned out ok, and he was very kind and made sure we got back to our accommodation building all right.

In the end, we flew back to Caracas, and returned to our room in Catia.

Venezuela adventures continue

The following is a “Postcard from Venezuela”, sent to friends and comrades in Australia in late January 2009.

Dear friends and comrades,

Here is an update on Coral and my adventures since early December when we last reported:

After the very successful Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) Brigade, November 20 to December 1, involving 32 people, visiting Caracas, Merida and

Valencia, and experiencing the Bolivarian Revolution at the grassroots first hand, we did some travelling to several parts of the country.

First, we visited the city of Merida, in the Andes mountains. There we made a couple of trips into the countryside to the villages of Culata and Jaji, the latter being a well-restored Spanish colonial style hamlet with lots of shops selling local handicrafts etc. The countryside and many regional towns of Venezuela are beautiful, and deserve more much more international tourism than they now get.

After that, we travelled by two overnight buses back to Caracas and immediately to the other side of the country, the eastern city of Puerto Ordaz. There we stayed at a very pleasant hostel, aptly named Villa Lobo, after its German owner Wolf. Puerto Ordaz is a centre of basic industry in Venezuela, with huge metal plants including the worker co-managed Alcasa aluminium factory and the SIDOR steel plant, nationalised last year by the Chavez government after a big workers' struggle.

Then we went back to the coast to the town of Barcelona, where we stayed with our Venezuelan-Australian friend Eulalia and her sister Maria. It was a very pleasant oasis of tranquillity, away from the creative chaos of Caracas.

Following this, we returned to Caracas and spent a wonderful Navidad (Christmas) with the family we live with in the suburb of Catia. Eating and drinking too much was the order of the day, much like back in Australia, but very different culturally.

In late December we flew off to Havana, Cuba, for two weeks, to join the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. We spent much of the time in Havana, but managed a side trip to the beach village of Playa Larga, a site of the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion, which was crushed by the Cuban people in 1961, opening the way for the consolidation of the revolution.

The second week we completed a program of meetings and visits organised by the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). This was a fascinating and informative experience, and increased our knowledge and appreciation of the achievements of the Cuban Revolution over half a century of struggle against US imperialism.

After returning to Caracas on January 11, we soon made a return visit to Valencia, staying with our friends Daniel Sanchez and his wife Yoly, who will both hopefully be coming to Australia for the Latin American Solidarity Conference in Melbourne, August 29-30 this year. Don't miss it!

Finally, we are preparing to leave Venezuela for the time being, to travel to Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, to act as international observers for the FMLN in the upcoming March 15 presidential elections. After victory in the parliamentary and local government elections in January, the FMLN is confident of a historic win in the

poll for president this time round.

Well, that's all for now. We will keep people posted on our future experiences in a further postcard in March.

Best wishes and solidarity,

Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter

We continued to observe the struggle in Venezuela, including the lead-up to a referendum on abolishing the two-term limit on elected posts. Previously, this proposal had been lost when the referendum on multiple constitutional changes was defeated a year before, in November 2007:

Venezuela: Popular mobilisation for ‘yes’ vote by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, Caracas, *Green Left Weekly*, January 30, 2009

At a rally of tens of thousands in Plaza Caracas on January 23, President Hugo Chavez called on Venezuelan workers to mobilise for the electoral battle for the “Yes” campaign for a vote in the February 15 referendum in favour of a constitutional amendment to abolish the two-term limit on elected positions in Venezuela.

“Each committee must be leading the campaign to the people”, Chavez stated, according to the January 24 *Diario Vea*.

“But nobody should invent strange strategies. Here there is only one leadership command; disciplined, with happiness and unity, we have advanced and we will keep advancing ...”

The rally followed a big march of workers, organised by unions and other organisations, several kilometres to Plaza Caracas in the centre of the city.

The marchers wore the red T-shirts of the Chavista movement, with countless slogans and names of popular organisations on them, and banners proclaiming support for the “Yes” campaign to allow Chavez to stand for re-election in 2012 in order to continue his role in leading the Bolivarian government’s project toward “socialism of the 21st century”.

The vote, set for February 15, also removes the two-term limit on elections to other public positions, such as governors and mayors.

Earlier that day, Chavez addressed a mass rally in the historic Barrio 23 Enero, marking the 51st anniversary of the fall of the Venezuelan dictator Perez Jimenez in 1958. He told the crowd, “The force should be in the street”, the January 24 *Ultimas Noticias* reported.

The “Yes” campaign has distributed huge numbers of leaflets in the communities refuting the main arguments in support of a “no” vote promoted by the US-funded right-wing opposition.

Supporters of a “yes” case point out that no limits on re-election is normal internationally, and exists in many European and other countries around the world. The “Yes” campaign also explains that the charge that Chavez is attempting to turn himself a dictator-for-life is absurd, as the proposal merely allows him to stand again for popular election, subject to the will of the people.

Almost daily rallies and meetings are being held by supporters of the “Yes” campaign around the country. On January 21, thousands of students marched from the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) to Plaza O’Leary in the center of Caracas.

Addressing the rally there, education minister Luis Acuna said, “Chavez has been a fundamental point of support for the advances that we have made in education in the last 10 years, with regard to inclusion, infrastructure and benefits for the university sector that are incalculable”, the January 22 *Diario Vea* reported.

Hector Rodriguez, co-ordinator of the Front of Youth of PSUV [the United Socialist Party of Venezuela], told the rally that, “This march is just the beginning of actions that Venezuelan youth and the students of our country are going to take to demonstrate that ‘Yes’ is the majority view of Venezuelan students.”

The students were also mobilising against the violent provocations by right-wing opposition students from private universities in the week before.

The acceleration of the “Yes” campaign coincides with a new opinion poll by the independent Venezuelan Institute for Analysis of Data (IVAD), showing that 54% of the population supported a “yes” vote, compared to 46% for “no”.

Commenting on the figures, communications minister Jesse Chacon noted that acceptance of the constitutional proposal had in fact increased markedly from a minority of only 44.4% for the “yes”, and 47.3% for the “no” in December.

In the end, the referendum was carried by a healthy majority.

Sojourn through Central America

Then at the end of January, we began our epic tour of Central America, flying in the first instance from Caracas to Mexico City. The main purpose of our trip was to follow the “Mayan trail,” and visit a number of the key sites of the extraordinary Mayan people of Central America, but also to be international observers for the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) of El Salvador, at the request of our Latino comrades in Brisbane.

The first minor incident occurred at the MC airport, where I managed to get separated from Coral in the luggage pick-up area, and we only re-united via an

announcement over the intercom.

Then, we got a fright when the TV screens reported that a French scientist had been shot dead after he withdrew a large amount of money at an airport exchange to help fund a Mexican research team. Then, his taxi was followed and he was killed by bandits when he refused to hand over the money.

Eventually, we were picked up outside the terminal by Rodolfo Pacheco, a friend of our friend Julie, who took us in his Volkswagen beetle to his parents' place in the MC suburbs. Rodolfo's father was a leather artisan who made bags and purses in his home, and we bought/were given some to take home as presents.

The time spent in MC was a real experience for us. We visited the main sites in the city centre, including the major museum, the Zocalo, the Plaza Garibaldi to dine out and listen to the Mariachi bands playing their trumpets etc.

We visited the Central University of Mexico, with its huge campus and murals by Diego Rivera. We also saw the art museum in the city featuring works by Rivera.

Then we took a bus to see Leon Trotsky's fortress home at Coyoacan, and nearby the house where Frida Karlo lived, which was full of her paintings etc.

Another day, we took a bus out into the desert to visit the great Aztec site of Teotihuacan, which was huge and magnificent. It was a big walk around the site, including climbing the many steps of the main pyramid.

Then, we also spent a day exploring the massive anthropological museum in MC, highlighting the Mayan and Aztec cultures and other historic relics. We were fascinated to see the stone basketball hoops, which played a role in the human sacrificial rituals of the Mayans.

We had arrived in Mexico just at the time of a huge march for social justice in Mexico City, and wrote it up for *Green Left* from news reports.

Mexico: Workers, farmers march for economic justice by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, *Green Left Weekly*, February 8, 2009

MEXICO CITY — Hundreds of thousands of workers and small farmers marched here and in other cities of Mexico on January 30 in a huge mobilisation for economic and human rights, calling for a change in the political economy of the country. The demonstrators in the capital gathered at various points around the city and marched to the central Zocalo Plaza.

“They were proclaiming that the [world economic] crisis is becoming much deeper, and that it was never a matter of a simple ‘hiccup’ in the system, and were demanding from the federal government that it should act now to prevent the bankruptcy of the workers’ pension funds, which have been converted into [mechanisms for] stealing

millions of pesos from workers' savings," reported the newspaper *La Jornada* on January 31.

"The independent workers' organisations announced during this huge march that they were presenting an initiative before the Congress of the Union to nationalise the workers' savings funds, and put an end to the continual pillaging of their resources." This demand flows from the privatisation of the workers' pension funds under the neo-liberal policies of the right-wing PAN [National Action Party] government in previous years.

"The leaders of the National Movement for Sovereignty over Food and Energy, the Rights of Workers and Democratic Liberties, known as the Class Alliance, called for unity in pursuit of a national agreement about governing in favor of the family economy and work. They noted that the workers have no responsibility for the economic and financial crisis, and were demanding that this not be resolved through a regressive workers' reform and that the workers will not retreat one step to support it. Moreover, [the leaders] were demanding the nationalisation of workers' savings and a halt to massive lay-offs," the newspaper *La Prensa* of January 31 noted.

"For the third consecutive year at the end of January, hundreds of thousands of members of the Class Alliance, which includes trade unionists, peasants, indigenous people, professionals and other workers, marched from the Angel of Independence [monument] to the Zocalo as part of a National Day of Struggle for a Change in Economic and Political Direction. They said that if there was no reply from the federal government to their demands they would organise a national general strike before the end of the first semester of this year," *La Prensa* reported.

"A representative of the UNT [National Union of Workers], Augustin Rodriguez, let it be known that there was a plan of action that the leaders of the federation of unions had agreed on, consisting of three basic points: to promote a dialogue with the executive, legislative and judicial powers; to demand from the federal government the establishment of 'concrete steps' to arrive at agreements; and if they are not taken, the unions will take measures to 'pressure them. We will take over the highways, the offices, the ports, the airports, and this includes moving to a national strike in the first semester of this year'," Rodriguez added.

Earlier, a rally organised by the CCC [Central Campesino Cardenista] in front of the US Embassy in Mexico City, delivered a letter directed to the president of United States, calling on him to renegotiate the TLCAN [North American Free Trade Agreement], in particular the section on the agriculture and fishing industries. The peasants then marched to join the main mobilisation in the Zocalo.

Benito Bahene Lome, leader of the Alliance of Transport Workers of Mexico, and

vice-president of the UNT, told the media on February 1, that it was urgent that the government of President Felipe Calderon adopt a “more Mexican” strategic position, corresponding to the reality of the country, not according to the dictates of the northern neighbour.

He said, “I think that in February and March, we are going to have a very grave situation, with increasing insecurity: There will be more delinquency, because above all we are exposing the youth, who need resources in order to live, and I think that we will touch the depths if the government does not adopt correct alternatives,” the February 2 *La Prensa* reported.

After our fruitful stay in MC, for which we thank our welcoming hosts Rodolfo and his parents, we set off by bus to the city of Oaxaca, where we stayed with members of the Pacheco family. From Oaxaca, we took a bus to visit the unique Mayan site of Montalban, on the top of a mountain.

The stone ruins were the remains of a Mayan city, which had been mysteriously abandoned in the 9th century AD. One theory is that they ran out of water for drinking and agriculture, and were forced to move on.

From Oaxaca, we continued southwards to the state of Chiapas. On the way, the front window of our bus was broken by a large stone. The bus driver stopped, and all the males including myself rushed out to see who had done it, but no one could be found.

We climbed back in and continued to the city of Tuxtla Gutierrez, which is the largest centre in Chiapas. We walked around the city, and enjoyed the sights.

From the city, we took a minibus tour up a winding road alongside a huge river gorge to a lake, where we transferred to a boat to travel up to the site of a major dam.

Stopping at one point, the sign said, “No entry due to poisonous snakes in the area.” At another stop, we were told that the cliffs had been a favourite spot for hang-gliding, until an Australian tourist was killed falling down the cliff-side in recent years.

From TG, we took another bus to the classic Spanish colonial town of San Cristobal de las Casas. The town was made internationally famous when the Zapatistas occupied it for a short while in 1994.

The cobbled streets and classical architecture make this town a wonderful example of the country’s history. We found a nice hotel in a side street, and were surprised to find it was not included in our *Lonely Planet* guidebook.

We advised the woman manager to contact LP and seek to have her lovely hotel included. We tried to find any contact with the Zapatistas, but were only able to visit a school where they were reputed to have stayed.

Travelling onwards through the countryside, which became more densely covered

with forest and jungle as we went on, we headed towards the famous Mayan site of Palenque.

On the way, we saw a number of military checkpoints aimed against the Zapatistas. They were currently surrounded in their mountain strongholds in Chiapas, and an uneasy truce was in place.

The wonders of Palenque

The next stop on our tour was the town of Palenque, just near the historic ruins of the Mayan city of Palenque. Palenque is up with Tikal in Guatemala as the grandest site of Mayan culture.

The remains of huge monuments and palaces sit in the jungle, and we spent a whole day there wandering around the big site. Palenque was eventually abandoned by the Mayans around the year 900AD, but the reasons are still not fully known — probably warfare, internal class conflict etc.

We also took another minibus trip to the lake at Agua Azul (Blue Waters), where there were more picturesque sights.

The town of Palenque is very basic, and we managed to get sick there from the water or food. I remember spending a rough night with diarrhea in our basic hostel.

From there we took another bus to the north-eastern city of Merida, in the state of Yucatan, described in *Lonely Planet* as “Yucatan’s most Mexican town — with Conquest-era buildings made from Mayan pyramids and a week-end fair of all-day dancing.” We actually saw the music and dancing in one of the plazas.

The buildings and museums were wonderful, and we got a real feel for the vitality of the lives of ordinary Mexicans, despite the severe social problems. We got a shock when we read that a Mexican general of police had been ambushed near Cancun, killed along with his bodyguards, by members of a drug gang. It was a wake-up call to the other realities of life in Mexico.

From Merida, we took a bus to the amazing Chichen Itza, “one of Mexico’s most famed archeological sites,” according to *Lonely Planet*. The Mayan town was conquered by the Toltec tribe from central Mexico in 987 AD, and eventually abandoned around 1224.

Highlights of the walk around the site included: the huge ball court, where games to the death were staged (see the film *Apocalypto*); the Cenote Sagrado (Sacred Senote), where 50 skeletons have been found; the impressive pyramid-style Templo de los Guerreros (Temple of the Warriors); the Group of a Thousand Columns; and the

Caracol (Snail), which was used as an astronomical observatory.

Avoiding the Gold Coast-like tourist city of Cancun, we then travelled to the famous Mayan fortress city of Tulum, right on the shores of the Caribbean Sea. We stayed in a hostel in the modern part of town, and took a bus out to the ruined site.

Tulum was reputedly an important port town in its heyday, 1200-1521 AD, according to the *Lonely Planet*. It was the last Mayan outpost to survive Spanish conquest, lasting 75 years after the invasion.

Rumour has it that Spanish galleons passed by its walls, seeing huge fires burning, and considering it to be too strong to be easily defeated. The ruins are very interesting, and the enclosed beach below is most inviting for swimmers.

Nearby, are beach huts where you can stay, and a nice café and hotel, where we went for lunch. Tulum was our last stop before heading southwards into Belize.

We hopped on a bus, heading south through the Mexican border town of Chetumal, where we changed buses, across the frontier to Corozal and then to Orange Walk in Belize to arrive in Belize City that evening. Belize was established as a haven for British pirates against the Spanish, and it shows today.

We found a nice small place to stay, the Belcove Hotel, on the banks of the Haulover Creek, which runs through the town. It is a quaint old city, made of wooden houses, with a rather run-down atmosphere, but rather relaxing.

The locals speak English, Spanish and Creole. We spent a couple of days walking around the town, to Fort George Lighthouse on the other side of the river, and to Albert Park on our side.

The highlight was a ferry ride out to the cayes, including Caye Caulker and Ambergris Caye, right near the barrier reef, a favorite place for snorkeling and diving. We walked along the beach of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, and had a pleasant drink at a beach café, before returning to Belize City.

The next morning, we boarded another bus to travel through the centre of Belize, to the biggest city of Belmopan, and then on to the Guatemalan border. After crossing the border, our bus took us along the shores of Lago del Peten Itza to the small village of El Remate.

This charming village sat on the banks of the lake, and we were able to enjoy the sun going down on the lake, and stayed in a pleasant little hotel close to the shore. The next morning we caught a mini-bus to visit the iconic Mayan site of Tikal.

Tikal is massive. It took us all day walking around 10km to see the huge number of temples, pyramids and plazas, including the Great Plaza, the North Acropolis, and the Lost World complex of temples.

We also visited a couple of museums and had lunch at a pleasant café. In the

evening, we returned to El Remate for the night.

From there, on February 24, we took a minibus to the small town of Flores, then a long bus ride to the capital, Guatemala City, via Coban in central Guatemala. We arrived in Guatemala City eventually, and took a taxi to a house in the suburbs where relatives of our Guatemalan friend and comrade Ovideo Orellana lived.

We soon met up with Ovideo and his friend Francisco, and were comfortably accommodated in their house in the southern part of the city. We took a bus into the centre, and visited a house associated with the URNG, the main left opposition organisation.

We also went to Central Park, and visited the impressive National Palace of Culture, featuring various exhibits from Guatemalan history and politics. I must say that GC had the least secure atmosphere of any of the Central American cities we visited — including San Salvador and Mexico City.

We then met up with a Member of Parliament from the URNG, who recounted being kidnapped and threatened by unknown assailants. This appears to be a common experience for progressive activists in Guatemala, which suffered a vicious dictatorship for decades which resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of people.

We also took a trip by car with Ovideo to visit his village of Colonia, where his family had owned a small house. He had set up an organic garden previously, when he had lived in Guatemala for a few years, but unfortunately it had been allowed to die off and be sold for another development.

After a few days in GC, we set off again by bus to the famous city of Antigua, the tourism capital of Guatemala. Antigua was the Spanish colonial capital of the country for more than two centuries, until being destroyed by an earthquake.

It was then rebuilt in classical Spanish colonial style, and has an abundance of churches and historic buildings, and is a mecca for overseas visitors. We found a cheap and pleasant hostel, and spent a day or two walking around the town, seeing the historic sights.

We then caught another bus to the tourist town of Panajachel, on the shores of Lake Atitlan, to the east of GC, in a mountainous region of the country. The lake was huge and we stayed in a pleasant hotel on the shore.

However, perhaps because of the long and bumpy rides in buses, I had developed a severe backache. And I remember it was sheer agony, going in a small boat across the lake, with every bump over the waves causing a shooting pain.

Somehow, we managed to get to the other side to the villages of Santiago de Atitlan and San Pedro de Laguna, where we visited a voodoo house. Then, we returned by boat to Pana, with my back killing me once again.

However, once we got going again on the bus back towards GC, the back seemed to settle down somewhat again. It wasn't such a problem for the rest of the trip, thank goodness.

We returned to our hosts' house in Guatemala City, and shortly afterwards joined Ovideo in setting off by bus towards the border of El Salvador. Thus began the main purpose of our Central American voyage — to act as international observers for the FMLN in the historic presidential elections of 2009.

El Salvador in the balance

Of course, we were a bit apprehensive approaching El Salvador, considering the long history of civil war and violent repression by the right-wing government and its associated death squads. However, perhaps under the pressure of world scrutiny, the ARENA regime and its army appeared to limit its overt repression at this time.

As it turned out, we were waved through upon arrival, and soon boarded another bus to travel to the capital, San Salvador. We drove through fairly flat terrain till arriving at the main bus terminal in the capital.

I'll never forget watching the TV in the terminal, complete with election adverts sponsored by ARENA, featuring footage of militant speeches by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, warning of a "Venezuelan communist takeover" of El Salvador if the FMLN were to win.

We eventually took a taxi to a suburb of San Salvador where Rafael Pacheco's sister Haydee lived. We eventually were admitted when Haydee returned from a meeting, and were given comfortable beds to sleep in.

Haydee had quite a large house, with a nice garden and a big bright red utility truck, which came in handy later. Next day, we were taken to the FMLN head office to be given a training seminar and credentials, which included a badge and a white coat as official international observers.

Prior to the election, we attended a mass rally in one of the main avenues in the city, to hear final words from the presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the FMLN team. We managed to find seats right up the front, and reported for *Green Left*:

El Salvador: Left support high amid fraud fears by Jim McIlroy,
San Salvador, *Green Left Weekly*, March 13, 2009

More than 300,000 people poured into the streets of San Salvador on March 7, for the

closing rally of the campaign for Mauricio Funes, the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation's (FMLN) presidential candidate for the March 15 elections.

The desire for change, after suffering decades of civil war and dictatorship — followed by two decades of extreme right-wing government under the US-backed Arena party — is clearly in the air.

The crowd, wearing red T-shirts, was extremely youthful, but included people of all ages and walks of life. Chants of “This time it’s different, Mauricio for President!” rang out at regular intervals.

“This mobilisation of people is a confirmation of the triumph that we will have next Sunday”, Funes declared, according a March 8 *La Prensa* report.

“I ask you not to renounce your desire for change. We are voting for change, and also preparing to defend our vote [against attempts at fraud].”

Funes also challenged the Arena candidate for president, former police chief Rodrigo Avila, to participate in a “face to face” debate.

Urging vigilance against electoral fraud by Arena, Funes called on all “sympathisers and militants” to mobilise to “protect the vote”.

“The party is gathering all the proof to present before the proper authorities and international observers”, *El Mundo* reported on March 9. “For some days, buses and trucks loaded with Guatemalans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans have entered the country ... guarded by the National Civic Police.”

Funes stated Arena was giving those entering the country false identity documents to allow them to vote illegally.

Funes alleged that the documents were being fabricated by a security business owned by a departmental director of Arena in San Salvador.

Names of people who have died still appear on the electoral roll. “Therefore, these foreigners are going to replace the dead, the people who are in prison and El Salvadorans who are overseas”, according to Funes.

He also alleged that various employers were ordering workers to take photos with their mobile phones of their voting papers, threatening them with the sack if they don’t prove they voted for Arena.

This is part of a campaign of lies and intimidation run by Arena in the lead-up to the vote. Endless TV adverts have appeared claiming that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez “wants to dominate El Salvador”.

“We should not allow Mauricio Funes to deliver our country to Hugo Chavez”, stated Rodolfo Parker, representing the Christian Democrat Party (PDC), which is supporting Arena in the poll.

Despite this campaign, backed by the big-business media, the FMLN campaign is

gathering huge momentum as election day draws near. To finish his campaign, Funes is holding a series of public rallies across the country.

At the regional town of Zacatecoluca, in La Paz province, Funes addressed an enthusiastic crowd of thousands on March 10.

Australian Socialist Alliance activist, Coral Wynter, who is visiting El Salvador as an international election observer, presented solidarity greetings to the crowd.

We had gone with Ovideo by bus to visit the town of Zacatecoluca, where we met up with some other Australian-based Salvadorans who had collected funds to help the people of the area. We attended a meeting of FMLN members in the town, and also a presentation ceremony in a village in a nearby rural area, and were greeted warmly as friends and comrades.

Despite some problems with a bad case of the runs from some dodgy food or water, we were able to attend an enthusiastic local election rally (see above). We then returned to San Salvador for polling day.

On the morning of the election, we got up early and were rushed off in a car to the FMLN headquarters, where we were allocated to a team with Ovideo. We then were called out urgently to a large football stadium in the city, where a huge number of non-Salvadorans had been bussed in from Guatemala and Honduras.

The allegation was that they had been issued with false voting ID cards, and were then being taken by ARENA to vote for the right-wing candidate. I remember standing at the gates of the stadium, taking photos of the buses carrying these people as they rushed out.

This was all useful evidence of the election fraud being practiced by ARENA in an attempt to rig the election. We even obtained admittance to the stadium after the buses had left, but were unable to find any direct evidence of the fraud.

Later, we and Ovideo were taken to a large voting station in the suburbs, where we were able to observe the votes being counted. I'm sure that all this international attention did limit the amount of fraud the right wing could get away with.

I remember one particular incident when a great uproar went up and one man was taken away by police because the crowd recognised him as a foreigner who was trying to vote. FMLN officials were allowed to question him, but he refused to admit anything conclusive.

But this popular attention did eventually win the day. That night, after the counting had revealed a victory for Funes and Sanchez Ceren, the people erupted with joy.

FMLN victory

El Salvador: Historic win for FMLN in presidential elections by

Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, *Green Left Weekly*, March 18, 2009

SAN SALVADOR — “From now begins a new chapter in the history of El Salvador. The victory of the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation) presidential team is based on the whole Salvadoran people, “Salvador Sanchez Ceren, newly elected vice-president for the FMLN, told a cheering crowd of thousands of red T-shirted party supporters at a huge rally here on election night, March 15. “This is a historic struggle lasting more than 20 years. We are going to work with all the sectors. We are going to unify,” he said, according to the newspaper *La Prensa* on March 16.

“They have always criticised the forward-thinking people, but today we have demonstrated our power. The FMLN is in party mood,” he added.

Wild celebrations began early in the evening throughout El Salvador, once it became clear that the FMLN would defeat the right-wing ARENA (National Republican Alliance), which has ruled the country with massive repression and corruption for over two decades. Official figures released by the TSE (Supreme Electoral Tribunal) later that night, with around 99% of the vote counted, gave the FMLN candidates Mauricio Funes for president, and Sanchez Ceren, 1,349,142 votes or 51.3% to ARENA’s Rodrigo Avila and Arturo Zablah with 1,280,995 votes or 48.7% of the national total. This represents a winning margin of 2.6%.

There is no question that the real margin for the FMLN would have been higher, except for systematic electoral fraud by ARENA, which controls the TSE and manipulated the electoral roll to permit bogus voting on a large scale. Considerable evidence, borne out by the experience of international electoral observers on polling day, indicates that many thousands of citizens of neighbouring Central American countries, particularly Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua, were brought across the borders by ARENA to vote with fraudulent DUIs (Identification Documents).

ARENA organised the manufacture of false DUIs in the names of dead people, prisoners and El Salvadorans living overseas, complete with replacement photos, to allow foreigners to vote. ARENA also produced duplicate DUIs to permit double-voting in many cases, the evidence strongly suggests.

The FMLN will be following up specific allegations, including reports made by international observers, in preparation for moves to thoroughly reform the electoral system prior to the next National Assembly elections, due in three years time.

Our own experience as international observers included investigating a huge

concentration of 10,000 ARENA supporters in the Cuscatlan Stadium in San Salvador, who were billeted there over the Saturday night before election day, and then transported in hundreds of buses and minibuses to the electoral centres on the Sunday, March 15. Substantial evidence exists that many of these people were fraudulent voters from Honduras.

The existence of major electoral fraud only makes the achievement of the FMLN in winning the presidential election even more significant. It opens the way for dramatic democratisation and social change in this country, which has been a symbol of the popular struggle of the Central American peoples against US-backed repressive regimes for decades now.

President-elect Mauricio Funes expressed the elation and sentiment of relief of the Salvadoran people when he told the rally of FMLN supporters on election night, "Tonight holds the same feeling of hope and reconciliation that made the Peace Accord (which ended the civil war in 1992) possible in our country," the newspaper *Diario Co Latino* reported on March 16.

"Today represents the signing of a new Peace Accord, of reconciliation of the country, as we said throughout the campaign." He repeated his invitation "to the different social and political forces to construct this unity together, based on tolerance, respect for differences and identification of our common objectives," the paper reported.

"I have said and I repeat it, my government will be motivated by the spirit of national unity, and I ask everyone to leave aside confrontation and revanchism ... We will take the decisions that are necessary to confront the crisis of the country," he added, according to the March 16 *La Prensa* newspaper.

Funes said his government would look for benefits for the majority of the population, especially the excluded sections. "I will work for the general wellbeing," he said, according to the March 16 *Diaria De Hoy*. "Our proposal is to construct an El Salvador with the most dynamic economy in Central America."

"I want to convert myself into a president of peace, of unity and progress. I want to be the president of social justice, and of a real reconstruction of the country." Funes said he would follow the path set by assassinated archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Romero, of "a preferential option for the poor".

Among the first international leaders to congratulate Funes and Sanchez Ceren was Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Other Latin American leaders have recognised the importance of the El Salvadoran result as a crucial victory for democracy in the region.

Manuel Zelaya, president of Honduras, said, "The triumph of the FMLN will catch the attention of the conservatives of Honduras," who should adjust their actions

accordingly, the March 17 *La Prensa* reported.

Travelling to the victory rally turned out to be the most dangerous aspect of the whole experience for us personally, as we were swept through the darkened streets of San Salvador in the back of Haydee's big red open truck, and nearly fell out, what with the sudden swerves and stoppages on the way!

In the end, we felt we had played some small part in the great victory of the Salvadoran people that day. This was confirmed by FMLN leader Nidia Diaz at a meeting for international observers from many countries the following day, when she thanked us all for our contribution, and said that the observers had played an important role in limiting the degree of fraud that the right wing could get away with on polling day.

Coral and I felt happy that we could give some concrete solidarity to our Salvadoran comrades, in El Salvador and at home in Australia. This event still gives me some pride in feeling that we had together with Ovideo and the others played a small part in making history that day for a struggling people in Latin America.

After the election, we did some tourist visits, and then joined with Ovideo in returning to Guatemala by bus. He stayed in Guatemala City, while we took another bus for the long trip to the border of Mexico and then on to Mexico City again.

There we met up with Rodolfo again, said goodbye to the family, and boarded our Mexicana flight back to Caracas. There we returned to our host family in Catia, and began preparations for the May Day AVSN Brigade, and another big adventure — Katrina and Nik's visit to make a film about our exploits in Venezuela. ■

7. The *Chasing Chavez* Saga

Next on our list of adventures was the saga of Katrina's film project, which came to be called *Chasing Chavez*. In early 2009 Katrina emailed us about her idea of coming to Venezuela to make a film about our attempts to meet President Chavez and give him a copy of our book, *Voices from Venezuela*, to reassure him that there was a solidarity movement with the Bolivarian Revolution in far-away Australia.

Below I publish a few of the emails we sent back and forth prior to the film being made.

Dear Mum and Dad,

I know you're busy but so am I. ... love and frustration

The film is going to feature you I think, Mum.

The brigade will have a big segment in the doco — the doco will be structured around it, but I want it to be about you trying to obtain an interview with Chavez.

The main theme will be based on trying to emulate socialism in Australia.

I want to interview Chavez!

Let me know,

Love, K

Dear Katrina,

We can only try. It is extremely hard to get an individual interview with Chavez; even John Pilger had difficulty nailing down an interview for his film, *War on Democracy*. But certainly there's a story in the Search for Chavez, whether it's finally successful or not.

We can get you other interviews on the way to Chavez, such as Education Minister Hector Navarro. That is great about publicising Socialism of the 21st Century for Australia as well.

Maybe our book can feature in the film as well. There will be no shortage of interviewees on the brigade and elsewhere. You will definitely need Coral's deep involvement for the translation in any case.

Looking forward to seeing you and Nik and working with you on this wonderful project,

Love,

Dad and Mum

February 12, 2009:

Hello,

We have booked for the 12th April, departing Venezuela on the 12th of May. I'm glad you're happy, I'm excited. Both Nik and I are really trying hard to pull this together so we can be prepared as possible, but I'm also working on this TV show, so at the moment I'm just sneaking in a quick email.

I'm working on the proper proposal, but it will be structured around Mum's endeavour to get an interview with Chavez himself; and including the brigade and low-income Venezuelans who are affected by the reforms.

I will get back to you. We have sent a proposal to SBS and they are slightly interested, so even a slight interest is something.

Speak soon,

Love, K

In the meantime, we sent the following greetings to the launch of our *Voices* book in Hobart:

Dear Susan and friends of Venezuela in Hobart,

Just a short note of appreciation for your attendance at the launch of our book, *Voices from Venezuela*, today. We would have loved to be there, but we are on duty in San Salvador, about to be international observers for the FMLN in the El Salvadoran presidential elections on March 15.

Everyone is hoping this will be the next big victory in the process of change sweeping Latin American, with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela in the vanguard.

Our book is intended to help tell the truth about the revolution in the words of grassroots and community activists in Venezuela. We will be returning to Venezuela on March 20 to help organise the next AVSN brigade.

Hopefully, you will decide to buy the book, and be inspired to visit Venezuela to see for yourself the big changes taking place there.

Best wishes to all,

In solidarity,

Jim and Coral

Susan Austin's speech to the launch of *Voices from Venezuela* book, Hobart, March 2009

Long after the collapse of the USSR led many people to declare that communism was dead, a poverty-stricken people in a South American country suffering under a two-party electoral system, rose up and elected Hugo Chavez as President. The story of how Venezuela, over the next ten years, has come to declare that it is building a new form of socialism, a "21st century socialism", is an interesting one indeed.

Many people throughout the world are now very interested in Venezuela, evidenced in part by the number of revolutionary tourists heading over there by themselves or on solidarity brigades to see first-hand what is going on (including myself, Alby and Duncan who went in November last year).

Also people throughout South America have been studying the revolution closely as they participate in the vast movement for change sweeping the continent, electing left-wing presidents, carrying out constitutional reform and democratic changes in country after country. Chavez's strong stance in support of the people of Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran has also earned the admiration of masses of people in the middle east who could be seen holding aloft images of Chavez in various anti-war rallies and have called for a leader like Chavez in their own countries.

There is a swag of books now available on the subject of Chavez and the revolution. But this book that we are launching today, *Voices from Venezuela*, is a special addition to the collection. That's because it is not a biography of Chavez or an analytical essay by Western Marxists on the trajectory of the revolution, but rather it is a collection of fascinating interviews with Venezuelans themselves. It allows the people involved in all facets of the revolution to give their own personal accounts, explanations and opinions of the changes that are going on and the challenges they face. It does include some very interesting essays on the characteristics of the revolution, by Marxist professors within and outside Venezuela, but mixed with these are interviews with grassroots community organisers.

The book is organised in bite-sized chapters, grouped into themes, so that if you are interested in the education, health, environment or workers control, you can turn to these chapters and read the various points of view. This means that sometimes the chronological order can be a bit confusing, but I think it is much better to have the chapters grouped into themes rather than the dates on which the interviews took place.

The authors, Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, spent a year in Venezuela. The book was published late last year. It is grounded by Jim and Coral giving backgrounds or explanations of what people say, so that those who are new to the revolution can understand the context. In fact, it is an excellent book for anyone who doesn't know

much about what's going on in Venezuela but wants a place to start. What better place to start than by asking the people themselves to tell their story?

Myself, Alby and Duncan had the privilege of setting off to Venezuela with the book under our arms, and then of meeting many of the contributors to the book to hear them speak first hand in November and December 2008, while on the solidarity brigade organised by the AVSN. Along with 30 or so others from Australia, NZ and Canada, we were able to tour around the country.

Jim and Coral helped to coordinate that brigade and we were able to talk to them a lot while we were there. So although the authors are not able to make it to this launch today (they are still overseas), we are pleased to be able to introduce their book to you, and give you a feel for some of the things it covers.

Chapter one includes essays that give a background to the revolution and summarise the fascinating sequence of recent events. At first Chavez set out to reform the constitution to make it more democratic, involving people all over the country in discussions and debates and finally putting to a referendum one of the most democratic constitutions any nation has developed. Then he went on to wage a battle against illiteracy, accepting volunteers from Cuba to develop a far-reaching literacy campaign that was able, in a matter of years, to eliminate illiteracy according to UN standards. At the same time, there was a health revolution which transformed the medical system.

The United States supported the wealthy business classes within Venezuela who were violently opposed to the changes sweeping their country, upsetting their reign of privilege. And in 2002, these forces kidnapped Chavez in a military coup, installing the business federation leader as un-elected president, abolishing the constitution. Within 24 hours the coup was defeated, as ordinary people flocked down from the slums to the palace to demand their elected president back, and forces loyal to Chavez and democracy within the army organised for his return.

Then came the oil lockout, where the opposition lay siege to oil production, crippling the country's economy for three months. Then came the recall referendum, when the opposition took advantage of a feature of the new democratic constitution to try and oust Chavez through a referendum, which also failed. Chavez has faced multiple elections and his popularity, measured by numbers of votes, has actually increased every time.

Buy the book, and join AVSN!

On March 25 Coral wrote to our old friend Rafael Pacheco back home in Brisbane about the El Salvadoran election experience:

Dear Rafael,

Thanks for all your help for the trip to El Salvador. Just to say we had a great time. It was

very inspiring being there. The whole place was covered in red posters, T-shirts, red electricity poles, not only in San Salvador but also in the countryside. We went to see the deputy David Rodriguez in La Paz. He was wonderful.

Thanks also for the contact with Haydee. She was very good and we had a bedroom to rest our weary feet. She was very busy and working very hard for the FMLN. Funes could not have won without the well-oiled machine of the FMLN and the hardened and disciplined cadre of the party.

It was a great fiesta at the end and we drove around the streets in Haydee's red truck like a bunch of hoons. We stayed well after 1am on Sunday night at the Redondel where Mauricio spoke at midnight. It was a great pity you could not have been there, after all your work in Brisbane and Australia. It was a tremendous feeling, and finally the hope that things will change.

The poverty is extreme there and we really noticed the difference with Venezuela as regards the poor living standards of the ordinary people. Again, thanks for all your help for our visit. It was certainly a memorable experience. There are some great people in the FMLN and we did a few interviews, which I hope will be published either in GLW or Links.

Un abrazo grande, Coral

May Day Brigade 2009

Following our return to Caracas from Mexico City in March 2009, we set about preparing for the pre-May Day AVSN Brigade to Venezuela: We sent the following greetings to the World At A Crossroads Conference back in Australia:

Greetings to the 'World At A Crossroads Conference', Sydney, April 10-13, 2009

This important conference occurs at a crucial time in world history. The international capitalist system is in deep economic crisis, the most serious since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The ecology of the earth is sliding into disaster, with human-assisted climate change threatening to wipe out all life on our planet.

The human race has indeed reached a crossroads in its development. The continuation of "normal" capitalism, of business as usual, is not an option: As the great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg stated in the early part of the last century, the choice is, "socialism or barbarism."

Or, as President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela put it, "Time is short. If we do not

change the world now, there may be no 22nd century.” And there is a real, practical choice facing humanity: continue down the path of neoliberal exploitation, poverty, racism, sexism, war and environmental destruction under capitalism, or take the road of “Socialism of the 21st century” as advocated by Chavez and increasingly taken up by the peoples of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and other countries of Latin America.

Commenting on the decisions of the recent G-20 meeting of world leaders in London on April 2, Chavez said, “They are talking about stricter regulation of the financial markets, but that is merely a salute to the flag, because it’s impossible to regulate that financial monster of the capitalist system, and they don’t want to accept that.”

Referring to the plan to inject US\$500 billion into the IMF and the World Bank, Chavez said, “giving them funds is like throwing meat to the vultures, because they are the villains that have destroyed the world.”

The road to a genuine alternative to capitalism, to a social system based on popular democracy and production for human need, not greed, has been opened with the advances of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, under the leadership of Chavez, and the people’s struggles in Bolivia and elsewhere in Latin America in this century. The aim of socialism in the 21st century is to develop the full potential and happiness of every single human being, a total impossibility under capitalism.

In our work in Caracas as correspondents for *Green Left Weekly*, representatives of the Democratic Socialist Perspective and Socialist Alliance, and as co-organisers of two Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) brigades in the last six months, we have observed the revolutionary process in Venezuela since October last year. We have seen the gradually expanding gains of the revolution, despite serious obstacles, and the struggles of the popular movement to build community power.

We also visited Cuba for the 50th anniversary of the first socialist revolution of the Western hemisphere in December-January, and noted the achievements of the Cuban people, who stood alone for decades against the might of US imperialism and its criminal blockade. The Cuban revolution, which was an inspiration to the oppressed peoples of the Third World, has now been itself strengthened by the progress in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.

And finally, we had the privilege and jubilation of being present at the historic victory of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in the presidential elections on March 15. As members of the team of international observers, we were able to join in the campaign to limit the massive electoral fraud schemes of the right-wing ARENA party, which had ruled El Salvador with harsh repression for the last 20 years.

These experiences convince us that a new, progressive road for Latin America, and

an example for the world, is being constructed. Socialist of the 21st century is not only necessary, but a realistic option.

Imperialism is in a weakened state, with the international economic crisis, and the disaster suffered by the US and its allies in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now is the time to launch a new counter-offensive against capitalism, and for socialism.

The discussions at the “World At a Crossroads Conference” this Easter in Sydney can play a part in the difficult but essential process of reconstructing the international socialist movement after decades of neoliberal attacks and setbacks for the progressive cause. We wish the conference participants well in their deliberations, and hope that new and stronger links can be established in building international solidarity between socialists and progressive people in Australia and different parts of the world.

Hasta la victoria siempre!

Venceremos!

Jim McIlroy, National President, DSP,

Coral Wynter, DSP member.

Caracas correspondents for *Green Left Weekly*.

Representatives of AVSN in Venezuela.

Next, we began preparing for the arrival of Katrina and Nik to make their film during the pre-May Day Brigade in April, 2009. We met them at La Guaira Airport, and accompanied them by taxi into the city.

Then, we began negotiations with government officials about the possibility of obtaining an interview with President Chavez for Katrina’s film. Below is a letter written regarding the request:

April 27, 2009

Request for interview with Hugo Chavez,

Sra Paula Andrea Jimenez,

Director for International Media,

Ministry for Communications and Information (MINCI),

Dear Senora Jimenez,

We are writing to you, following our conversation with Cesar Torres of your department on April 27, to request assistance with our project to seek a short interview with President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Hugo Chavez, as a key part of a film we are making aimed at broadcasting on television in Australia.

The film is directed at telling the truth about the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, against the lies and distortions being circulated by the mass media in Australia and the rest of the English-speaking world, such as the anti-Venezuelan government line contained in a program from the US recently screened on SBS TV in Australia, called

The Hugo Chavez Show. By contrast, our film will show the interviews and activities of the recent Solidarity Brigade of Australians, who were here in Caracas for 10 days in April. We want to help correct the balance of media coverage of Venezuela, to show the great advances made by the Venezuelan people over the last 10 years.

The makers of the film are Katrina Channells and Nikolas Lachajczak, from Brisbane, Australia, who have recently been working with the Aboriginal television company Carbon Media, making documentaries concerning Indigenous issues around Australia. Katrina made a film entitled, *Keeping Both Campfires Burning*, about family reunion in the outback Northern Territory community of Maningrida. A copy of the film was sent to President Chavez by the Venezuelan charge d'affaires in Australia, Nelson Davila.

Assisting with the film are Katrina's parents, Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy, who are longstanding campaigners for international solidarity with Venezuela. They lived in Caracas for a year in 2006, and authored a book, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, about their experiences at that time, published in English in Australia in 2008. Coral Wynter also participated in a press conference of international journalists in November, 2006, where she invited President Chavez to visit Australia.

Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy have also co-organised a number of Solidarity Brigades from Australia, sponsored by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), which altogether have brought more than 200 Australians to Venezuela to see the reality of the Bolivarian Revolution for themselves.

Also helping with the film is Eulalia Reyes, a Venezuelan-Australian, who has lived in Australia for more than 20 years, but is now staying in Barcelona, and is an enthusiastic supporter of the revolution and President Chavez.

We strongly feel that a short interview with President Chavez would greatly strengthen our film, and magnify its impact within Australia and, hopefully, around the rest of the English-speaking world. We would greatly appreciate any assistance you can give us with this project.

We would also be keen to attend any public or media event which President Chavez may speak at in the coming two weeks. Seeking your urgent attention, as our tight schedule means we are leaving Caracas to return to Australia on Sunday May 10. Please find attached our identifications.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours in solidarity,

Coral Wynter (Channells), Jim McIlroy, Katrina Channells, Nikolas Lachajczak, Eulalia Reyes.

Postcard from Central America

We finally managed to send a letter/postcard to Australian friends on March 30 about our recent activities in Latin America:

Hello to all friends and comrades,

Coral and Jim have just returned to Caracas, Venezuela, from a wonderful trip through Mexico and Central America. The culmination of the trip was to participate as international observers in the March 15 presidential elections in El Salvador, won by the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front), after 20 years of domination of the country by the extreme right-wing ARENA party.

The victory by FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes and vice-presidential nominee Salvador Sanchez Ceren led to popular celebrations all around El Salvador. It broke the strongest link in the chain of repressive rule by US-dominated regimes, which had held a stranglehold on Central America for decades, and means El Salvador will now join the movement for social change and revolution throughout Latin America.

We had the personal excitement of helping to expose the fraudulent voting schemes of ARENA, and perhaps in a small way contributing to the electoral victory of the FMLN, when we attended as international observers, surrounded by armed police, the Cuscatlan Stadium to investigate the bussing of thousands of alleged Hondurans with bogus El Salvadoran identity cards to voting centres in San Salvador.

And the highlights of this experience were the huge rally of 300,000 FMLN supporters at the campaign closure on March 7, the Saturday prior to polling day (just like a rally for President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela!), and the election night mass celebration in the streets of San Salvador, in which thousands of cheering Salvadorans participated.

Prior to this experience, we travelled for several weeks from Mexico City down through the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and then to the Yucatan Peninsula, following the trail of the major ruined cities of the great Aztec and Mayan civilisations of pre-Hispanic Mexico. In Mexico City, we visited the Aztec site in the city itself and the towering pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at Teotihuacan nearby, as well as the fabulous Anthropological Museum in MC, plus many other great sites including Leon Trotsky's house, and museums for the Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

Travelling through Mexico, we visited the ruined Mayan cities of Monte Alban, Palenque, Chichen Itza and Tulum, as well as the wonderful historic Spanish cities of San Cristobal de las Casas and Merida. Later, we also visited the huge, deserted Mayan city of Tikal in northern Guatemala. The great question remains not completely answered: why did all those cities, part of one of the most advanced civilisations of the period (when Europe was plunged into the Dark Ages), from around the time of Christ

to 900AD, become virtually deserted and fall into ruins around the end of the 8th century?

Environmental, and well as economic and social-political factors seem to all have played a part in the collapse of the great Mayan cities. Could there be a lesson for us today in this catastrophe?

Travelling south from Yucatan, we briefly visited Belize, a strange, English-speaking enclave in the midst of Spanish America. It was founded by British pirates centuries ago, and seems to have been left to them by the British government, as it is very poor and underdeveloped.

Guatemala is a mixture of beautiful countryside, including volcanoes and lakes, with Hispanic towns like Antigua well-preserved, and deep social problems, especially deep poverty and violence linked to the drug gangs. Guatemala, which, like El Salvador, is trying to recover from the terrible effects of repressive military regimes over many decades, may be next to experience a progressive political change in Central America. Best wishes to our friends in the revolutionary movement there!

In Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador we were warmly received and looked after by friends and their families, all of whom are part of the movements for social revolution in those countries. We thank them deeply for their hospitality and humanity.

The whole experience of visiting Mexico and Central America was an eye-opener to the wonderful indigenous heritage of this region, as well as a learning experience about the serious political and social problems the peoples are struggling to tackle. It also underlined the leadership role of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela in the social revolution sweeping Latin America today.

We return to Caracas, hopefully with a better understanding of the Mexican and Central American reality, and keen to help spread the word about the movements for social change in that region.

In solidarity,

Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter.

Following is a report on the April 2009 pre-May Day AVSN Brigade:

Australian brigade sees Venezuelan revolution first-hand by Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter

CARACAS — The ninth Australian Solidarity Brigade to Venezuela, sponsored by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), visited here from April 16 to 24, to see first-hand the reality of the Bolivarian Revolution, led by socialist President Hugo Chavez. The 13 Australians, trade unionists, students and retirees, heard accounts of the achievements and problems of the revolution, and toured barrios and communities

which are carrying through the struggle for popular power which has characterised the Bolivarian Revolution over the last 10 years, since Chavez was first elected president at the end of 1998.

The brigade, which normally features the big May Day march held in Caracas each year, was set earlier than usual to allow some participants to also visit Cuba for the special May Day celebrations being held there to mark the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Nevertheless, meetings with representatives of the progressive union federation, the National Union of Workers (UNT), were conducted in both Caracas and the regional city of Valencia, capital of Carabobo state.

On the first day, a forum at the International Miranda Centre (CIM) heard Greg Wilpert, director of Venezuelanalysis.com, Carlos Escalona from CIM, and science tutor Andres Eloy Rodriguez, speak on different aspects of the revolutionary process. These included the history of the Bolivarian Revolution, the workers' movement including experiments in co-management, and the remarkable development of Venezuela's public health system.

On the second day, brigadistas visited the Catia Endogenous Development Zone, where they saw a T-shirt and a shoe-making cooperative, a Barrio Adentro 2 diagnostic health clinic, the site of a petroleum technical university and an organic garden. They later met with representatives of Banmujer, the Women's Bank, who explained the unique role of the bank in funding women's cooperatives and carrying out educational projects.

Saturday saw us conducting a history walk through central Caracas to view the house where 19th century Venezuelan independence leader Simon Bolivar was brought up, the Bolivar museum and other sites. That afternoon, we heard author and journalist Eva Golinger explain the development of US interference in Venezuelan affairs, including the implications of the change in presidents from Bush to Obama.

On April 19, the brigade traveled to Valencia, where they attended a meeting between Vice-Minister for Communes Lidice Altuve and members of the Rebirth of the South Commune in southern Valencia. Communes are pilot projects for the latest expansion of popular democracy in Venezuela, combining more than 20 local communal councils, as a further step toward Chavez' goal of constructing Socialism of the 21st Century.

The next two days involved visits to barrios whose communal councils are part of the new commune, and other activities allowing us to experience aspects of the struggle for people's power in Venezuela today. As well as visiting the UNT headquarters in Valencia, members of the brigade also attended a union meeting of construction workers, as well as the offices of the electrical workers' union, FETRAELEC.

After a trip to Venezuela's biggest port city, Puerto Cabello, and a swim at a nearby

beach, the brigade returned by bus to Caracas. There we heard a talk on Indigenous affairs in Venezuela by Jose Poyo, president of the Latin American Indigenous Parliament, including an account of the campaign by Indigenous peoples to defend their land rights.

On the final day, the brigade heard an informative talk on Venezuelan history and current politics by Professor Marcelo Alfonzo, director of the Institute of Experimental Medicine at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). The program concluded with a walk-through of UCV and the nearby campus of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), highlighting the contrast between the old, established UCV, dominated by right-wing politics, and the new, revolutionary education system incorporated in the UBV — housed in the former offices of the national oil company, PDVSA.

The April 2009 AVSN Solidarity Brigade succeeded in allowing more Australians to experience the gains and challenges facing the Venezuelan Revolution, and in building international links between the Australian community, including unions, and the Bolivarian process. For anyone interested in future brigades, (the next one being set for December 1 to 9 this year), visit the AVSN website, www.venezuelasolidarity.org.

Then, a fortuitous change in plans:

Dear all,

Sudden change of travel plans: Due to the opportunity coming up for possible involvement in *Alo Presidente* on Sunday, and-or interview with President Chavez, for the film, we have changed our travel plans to leave on Fri May 15, arriving back in Sydney on Sun May 17 at 10am, via Aerolineas Argentinas.

Please adjust any arrangements this coming week accordingly. Sorry for any inconvenience, but we could not pass this chance up.

Regards,

Jim and Coral (with Katrina and Nik).

Following much toing and froing, the film mission was completed. And we did manage to appear on *Alo Presidente* with Chavez, in Barinas!

Our old friend Marcelo Alfonzo wrote on May 13:

Hi Jim. Congratulations for your sensational appearance in *Alo Presidente*, now you and Coral are international Chavez 'stars'.

My best regards

Marcelo

We completed the filming, and spent a few days on a wonderful stay in the mountains between Barinas and Merida, before returning to Caracas, and flying back to Australia, via Buenos Aires.

Politics back in Brisbane

In Brisbane, AVSN sponsored an Eyewitness Report on Venezuela: Celebrating the 21st Century Revolution, in May 2009, at the Brisbane Activist Centre in Fortitude Valley. Coral and I spoke on our experiences of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela, and our time as official observers of the FMLN election victory in El Salvador.

Meanwhile, we soon found ourselves heavily involved in politics at home. Back in Brisbane, we campaigned against Labor Premier Anna Bligh's plans to sell off state assets. I issued the following media release on behalf of Brisbane branch SA on May 29, 2009:

Fight Qld govt privatisation plans! Socialist Alliance call

"The plans by the Queensland Labor government to sell off major public assets are an outrage, and should be fought by all unions, community organisations and ALP members," Marg Gleeson, Socialist Alliance representative and Australian Services Union (ASU) delegate said on May 29. "The Bligh government even has the hide to use the excuse of the costs of the recent floods in this state to try to justify their privatisation plans.

"Selling off the people's assets, such as electricity facilities, rail, ports, airports and infrastructure, is never justified. It is basically theft of people's property; handing it over to the private sector, under the discredited ideology of neoliberalism," Gleeson said.

"It is especially criminal to do it right now, during the economic crisis, when market prices for any assets will undoubtedly be well below their real value.

"The experience of the fight against privatisation of the power industry in NSW shows that a united campaign by unions, community members and the rank and file of the Labor Party and other political organisations can be a powerful force, but needs to be built up and maintained over a period of time," she said.

The campaign has begun with shopfloor meetings by some unions in Queensland, but needs to be stepped up, with industrial action, and protests, starting with the Queensland ALP State Conference at the end of next week, she added.

"We can't allow the Bligh government to get away with this blatant hand-over of our assets to the corporate sector," Gleeson concluded. "We need to act immediately to stop this robbery in its tracks."

We organised an international solidarity BBQ at the Terrace Street house in New Farm on May 31, featuring ourselves speaking on Venezuela and Central America; with Paul Benedek and Marcela Valenzuela, and Dave and Helen Riley, talking about

their experiences from their recent international trips around the world.

Shortly afterwards, I was booked in to speak at Wollongong SA branch's Solidarity Dinner. The theme was Latin America: Continent in Revolt, and featured Venezuela as well as other countries experiencing the rise of the "Pink Tide" movement.

During this time, our dear daughter Katrina had a big party at the Merthyr Bowls Club on the banks of the Brisbane River to celebrate her 21st birthday. It was a great event, and many friends and family came along to join in. After the party she was out on the town all night in Fortitude Valley with her friends. My sister Fiona attended and sent the following message on July 23:

Thanks for hosting the 21st party of our 'Sweet Katrina', we had a wonderful enriching and relaxing time celebrating and feasting together with you all.

'Twas also good to talk to Alice and Gen and others.

Special time also to remember Cec as the inspiration she was.

I am sending the Sweet Katrina song words as I promised Katrina.

Hope her casting is going well. Bowen enjoyed the opportunity to be there.

Love

See you in Canberra soon

Fiona and Tony

Promotion of the Chavez film

Promotion of the Venezuela film continued:

Chasing Chavez. Preview of a new film on Venezuela by Brisbane-based filmmakers ... Katrina Channells and Nikolas Lachajczak. The film centres on the experience of Coral Wynter, a longstanding solidarity activist with people's struggles in Latin America who has recently lived in Venezuela and observed the Bolivarian revolution, which is changing Venezuelan society and inspiring upheavals all around the continent. The film follows Wynter's efforts to interview Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez and present him with a copy of *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, a book she co-wrote with Jim McIlroy.

Then, our farewell party from Brisbane occurred at the Activist Centre on August 22.

Shortly after our Brisbane farewell event, we drove down to Sydney via Armidale along the New England Highway. It was a major operation, with all our furniture and boxes of possessions being delivered in Chippendale very soon after we arrived.

Next, we had to respond urgently to the US-backed military coup in Honduras. This was a return to business as usual for the CIA in Latin America:

Sydney emergency rally against coup in Honduras by Jim

McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, September 25, 2009

SYDNEY — “Within hours of President Zelaya being seized and expelled by the coup plotters [in June this year], the Honduran people went into the streets to support his return. They have been mobilising every since to demand the restoration of democracy in my country,” Santiago Reyes, a member of the the National Resistance Front of Honduras, told an emergency rally of around 50 people in the Latin American Plaza here on September 24.

The rally was organised by the Latin American Social Forum, supported by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network. The main demands of the rally were to: Oppose the military coup regime in Honduras, and support the return of legitimate President Manuel Zelaya.

AVSN co-ordinator in Sydney John Gauci explained on September 23, “The situation in Honduras is dire, with the illegitimate coup regime imposing a curfew, cutting electricity, tear-gassing and firing on Zelaya supporters assembled outside the Brazilian embassy. Democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya returned to Honduras yesterday, and sought refuge inside the Brazilian embassy. There are frightening reports of democracy protesters now being rounded up into stadiums.

“The Honduras resistance is calling for emergency protests to be held around the world in defence of human rights and democracy in Honduras,” said Gauci. “We in Australia have a responsibility to insist that democracy is peacefully restored to the people of Honduras. We call on the Rudd government to condemn the coup and cut all political and economic ties with Honduras until democracy is restored.”

Other speakers at the Sydney rally included Giovanni from the LASF, Lisa Macdonald from AVSN, Jim McIlroy from Socialist Alliance, Denis Doherty from the Communist Party of Australia and Marce Cameron from the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

During the rally, the crowd joined together in chanting, “The people united, will never be defeated!”

Daniel & Yoly’s tour

The tour of Venezuelan activists Daniel and Yoly Sanchez took place shortly after we arrived in Sydney. At the start of the tour, Daniel and Yoly were guests of honour at the Latin America Solidarity Conference held at the Victorian Trades Hall in Melbourne on August 28-29.

We travelled down to Melbourne for the conference and to accompany Daniel and Yoly to Geelong for the second Venezuela solidarity forum of their national tour. They were overjoyed to join in a trade union rights rally in Melbourne during their stay.

At the end of their national tour, they joined us at Shepherd Street, and presented their final solidarity meeting at the Activist Centre in Abercrombie Street, Chippendale. It was a busy time for Coral and myself, as we hosted Daniel and Yoly, at the same time as getting re-established in the Shepherd Street house.

After our Venezuelan friends left to return home, we were invited to present a Venezuela solidarity forum by Bea and the other comrades in New England. This meant another car trip up the highway to Armidale.

Then, yet another change of plans. Having moved back to Sydney from Brisbane after some 22 years, I volunteered to return to Brissie because of the urgent need for an organiser of the DSP branch, with Paul and Marcela moving to Sydney at the end of 2009:

To Brisbane comrades re transfer of Jim Mc to Bris for 2010,
November 16, 2009:

Dear Brisbane comrades,

This is to let you know that the DSP National Executive Secretariat meeting today agreed to the transfer Jim Mc to Brisbane from mid-late February until July next year. As discussed previously, Jim's role will be to work with comrades in Brisbane to help create/strengthen Resistance and Socialist Alliance organising teams so that when he returns to Sydney mid-year, Brisbane branch can self-organise.

Jim will also continue to have some national assignments/responsibilities while he is in Brisbane, but you can now factor him into your discussions over the next month or so about the branch building perspectives and priorities for 2010.

Give me a ring if there are any queries.

Comradely,

Lisa M

Debate in the DSP over directions

At the end of 2009, we faced a crucial decision in the DSP about whether to fully integrate into Socialist Alliance. The following is my contribution to the DSP Pre-Conference Discussion on the topic.

The DSP had previously experienced a long and bitter faction fight over the issue of strengthening involvement of the DSP within SA, involving John Percy, Doug Lorimer and other longstanding leaders of the party as opponents of the move. The conflict led eventually to a split in the DSP in 2008, with the minority forming a new organisation, the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

Why we should support the National Executive platform by Jim Mcllroy (Sydney Central branch), December, 2009

We as members of the DSP are entering on a crucial new phase of our history, with the proposal by the National Executive to merge ourselves thoroughly into the Socialist Alliance. The key part of the National Executive platform which defines the future of the DSP after January 2010 is the following section from Peter Boyle's Party-building Perspectives report to the October 2009 National Committee plenum:

The DSP national executive is proposing that we convert the DSP into a non-caucusing tendency of opinion with the same aims and objectives as in the current constitution. It would be a tendency committed to furthering those objectives, to promoting the political ideas and traditions of the DSP as a contribution to socialist education and praxis in Socialist Alliance. But its members would be organising within the structures of Socialist Alliance and under the day-to-day leadership of Socialist Alliance bodies.

Our objective is to forge a new collectivity within SA but, at this stage, the national executive believes we still have to allow for the possibility of resuscitating the DSP as a disciplined, regularly caucusing and dues-collecting organisation at some later stage, only if it becomes necessary.

With the national committee's agreement, the DSP national executive will begin working out an amended constitution that neither mandates nor prohibits the DSP from resuming operating at a future stage as a disciplined and regularly caucusing organisation. However, the DSP congress in January should adopt a policy of not regularly caucusing and elect a national steering committee tasked with implementing the merger into SA.

The proposed new DSP constitution would have a simple structure comprising a national steering committee (with the right to admit/exclude members on basis of agreement with objectives and tasked with carrying out the merger into the Socialist Alliance) elected by an assembly of members/conference (to be held at least every two years or on petition by 30% or more of DSP members).

No DSP dues will be mandated but all DSP members have to have Solidarity Subscriptions to *Green Left Weekly* (or ordinary subscriptions as a concessionary rate)

and be financial members of the Socialist Alliance.

Three co-conveners to be elected by the national steering committee with the power and duty to convene steering committee meetings when necessary or when demanded by 30% or more of steering committee members.

Members shall have single (no proxy) vote in an assembly/conference.

The power to change the DSP constitution to be vested in the assembly of members/conference. The national steering committee to facilitate circulation of proposals for constitutional or policy change.

The DSP national executive does not anticipate that there will be a need to go back to organising the DSP in its current form. We are confident that the merger process will succeed and in less than a year comrades will be confident that we have a new party to be confident and proud of. But we are signalling that our bottom line is to do the job needed and if for some reason that we do not anticipate at present we have to pull back from organising wholly through the Socialist Alliance then we will be prepared to do that.

But the DSP national executive's perspective is to focus on a powerful and exciting future building the Socialist Alliance as our party.

I believe that this relatively straightforward and uncomplicated proposed new DSP constitution and structure is the best way to go forward in the new circumstances. It effectively means that the DSP as a separate organisation to SA would be put "on hold" but with an "insurance policy" mechanism, just in case the merger does not proceed satisfactorily enough.

Moreover, while the proposed new leadership structure is limited to a steering committee elected by an assembly/conference of members held at least every two years, there is also provision for a special conference to be held at the petition of 30 per cent of DSP members. This mandates the democratic right of members to call for a radical reconsideration of the project, if they think the SA merger process requires urgent review.

Process of integration

The basis of the proposal is that we are confident in the ability of the DSP/SA merger to succeed. We are saying that all our work can and should proceed through the bodies and structures of SA.

It completes the process of integration of the resources, cadres and political work of the DSP into SA, which we effectively began when SA was originally formed in 2001. Of course, we decided to step back from the full commitment of our resources to SA in 2005, at a time when the other original socialist groups in the SA regroupment pulled out.

At that time, we assessed that it was premature to attempt to merge with SA, as the

original form of the project had not succeeded. Since then we experienced a sharp faction fight within the DSP with the Leninist Party Faction, ending in the split in 2008 and the formation of the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

At that time, the great majority of the DSP members chose not to dump SA, and to continue with building it as a broader socialist organisation — while simultaneously attempting to construct the DSP as a separately operating Marxist cadre tendency within SA.

The experience of the past two years has taught us that the attempt to build two organisations simultaneously is not feasible in the current circumstances. Unless we decided to retreat to concentrating on the DSP alone, we really have no option but to move forward to constructing the SA as our socialist party project for the next period.

What this means is that we must seek to carry out all our work — *Green Left Weekly* distribution, other publications, finances, internal meetings and public forums, mass work, socialist education and our international solidarity work — through the structures and processes of SA.

This is the only effective way to proceed at present. To attempt to hive off some of our tasks, such as political education or international solidarity, into a rump DSP remnant body, would result in a severe weakening of those high-priority areas.

The reality is that it is not possible to maintain the DSP as a functioning, democratic-centralist organisation, while the bulk of our political work and cadre resources are applied to SA. The DSP cannot operate as a cadre party organization in the old way, with only quarterly or six-monthly meetings.

Development of SA

What this means is that we must take the core of our politics and our cadre commitment into SA, and seek to develop SA into an organisation which has space for various levels of activism and political commitment — including the highest levels of cadre activity which we have built up over decades in the DSP.

This does not mean SA will be merely a “re-badged DSP”. It will have room for different political views, but most certainly the Marxist-based current will remain very strong within it, and likely to strengthen further.

All indications so far are that most independent SA members are quite happy to welcome the transfer of the DSP’s Marxist education resources into SA, while accepting that a future SA socialist education program will grow and develop from real experience and with input from independent SA members.

As for international solidarity work, SA already has a strong policy and commitment to building solidarity with the peoples’ struggles of the Third World and other countries.

The best way to develop this work is from within SA, not artificially separated out and allocated to a DSP which is not functioning on a day-to-day basis.

In addition, the program and policies of SA, already set within an explicitly socialist framework, will deepen in their theoretical and practical basis as SA throws itself into the class struggle, nationally and internationally.

This applies to areas such as climate change, and trade union work, as well as international solidarity with Third World and other struggles. In particular, the best way to develop solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution and other progressive movements in Latin America is by involving SA even more deeply than it is already in the work of AVSN, the Latin American Social Forum and other solidarity organisations.

In the course of involvement in this solidarity work, SA's theoretical analysis of the Latin American and other revolutions will undoubtedly deepen. This is natural and positive.

Putting socialism back on the map

The aim of all this is to break out of the relative isolation of the socialist movement in Australia, and to build a socialist organisation which can put the socialist alternative back on the political map in this country. Socialist Alliance can be such an organisation, if we apply our full and undivided resources and efforts to this goal.

SA will inevitably be broader than the DSP. It will remain open to other socialist organisations to join or rejoin in the future.

Moreover, it can be a pluralist organisation, with room for different levels of activism, including the strengthening of cadre in the best traditions of the DSP. We hope that SA will, in total, demonstrate a higher degree of total "cadre power" and number of activists than the current DSP does.

At the same time, many members may choose to take a lower level of activism and commitment. But everyone will be encouraged to contribute something positive to the overall life of the organisation.

In the current ecological, economic and political crisis of capitalism, the challenge to build a strong and vibrant socialist organisation in Australia is crucial. SA can become the first stage of a new socialist party-building project, provided we in the DSP commit ourselves fully and unreservedly to this task.

In the event, an overwhelming majority of the DSP membership supported the NE proposal, and Socialist Alliance was considerably strengthened as a result. Personally, I have no regrets about the decision to fully integrate the old DSP into SA, and believe it was the best outcome for the future of both Socialist Alliance and the future, broader socialist movement in Australia.

Distributing *Green Left Weekly*

Meanwhile, I threw myself into political work in Sydney, especially my number one passion, which was, and still is, writing for and distributing the party paper — *Green Left Weekly* (now *Green Left*).

The lead-up to the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference was a period of huge public debate, with pressure on the Kevin Rudd Labor government to take strong action on climate. *Green Left* received a positive reaction on the streets:

GLW Blitz paper gets good initial reception by Jim McIlroy (Sydney Central branch)

First reaction in the streets to the *GLW* Blitz edition, featuring Copenhagen and a Green Economy, was positive in my experience. On Monday afternoon, I sold at Town Hall corner here and managed 8 sales in just an hour.

People, especially young people, are quite receptive to the issue, especially if you belt out the message to them, “For real action on climate change, read *Green Left Weekly*”, etc.

The conclusion is that we can succeed with our Blitz week if we put in the hours and try out new places where people gather, especially the streets, train stations, concerts and special spots. Just do it!

Venezuela solidarity work continued to be an important priority, for Coral and myself, and for the DSP.

In early 2010, I prepared to return to Brisbane to organise the branch, while Coral set off back to Caracas to do cancer research and teach with Margot and Marcelo at the Central University of Venezuela. A farewell party was held on my 64th birthday.

We were happy to have our daughters visit us for the occasion. We wrote to them on February 18, 2010, saying how thrilled we were to have the whole family reunited once again.

From Brisbane, I wrote to Coral on March 1, 2010:

It is good that the cancer project is going full steam ahead. That is good for you and for Venezuela.

A revolution is not a dinner party, as Chairman Mao once said. The crucial thing is the organisation of the masses. Hopefully the communal councils and the communes are progressing. In the end, despite all the problems, the people will have to choose whether to go forward with Chavez, or back to the bad old days with the opposition and the US. We can only do our small bit with the solidarity movement to help out. We have to combat the lies of the media and the politicians in the West.

You should feel happy that you are doing your part to help the revolution.

On March 27, I wrote to Coral again:

Have a happy Semana Santa [Easter]! I remember it well. Just don't try to travel by bus anywhere. Sounds like you are very busy. There are more tasks than you even planned when you left. That's the way it is in Venezuela.

I read the draft brigade itinerary and it sounds great. I am starting to fit back into the old neighbourhood in Brisbane once again. Everyone asks after you.

Again, I wrote on April 6:

Glad you had a nice Easter. I had a relatively quiet one, except for the film night and the BBQ.

I have created three volumes of my *Green Left Weekly* articles back to 1991 by printing them off and putting them in spring folders. They make interesting reading and bring back a lot of memories of our political work together over the last 20 years.

Slowly, slowly is the watchword for the Venezuelan revolution, although I suspect something dramatic will occur in the next few years, to either push the revolution qualitatively forward or set it back.

Brisbane events & campaigns

I interviewed Sam Watson for *Green Left* in the run-up to the upcoming election:

"The 2010 federal election is an opportunity for the Aboriginal community to pass judgment on the Rudd Labor government's policies on Aboriginal affairs," Sam Watson, Murri community leader and Socialist Alliance Senate candidate for Queensland, told *Green Left Weekly* on April 12.

"In 2007, the Howard government was thrown out of office because of popular opposition to its policies on many issues. It is unlikely that Rudd is in real danger of losing power, but there still needs to be a protest vote right across the Aboriginal community against the racist policies of the federal Labor government.

"The Aboriginal people will make this election a referendum on the Rudd government. Three years on from the fall of the extreme conservative Howard government, things have not changed for Indigenous people. If anything, they have got worse.

"Howard's Northern Territory Intervention has been continued under Rudd. The NT Lands Rights Act has been overridden. The Anti-Discrimination Act has been effectively overturned.

"Aboriginal unemployment, lack of education, and poor housing are at record

levels. Aboriginal health is worse than Fourth World standard, especially when compared to the mainstream community. Our people continue to suffer one of the lowest life expectancy rates in the world.

“When you apply a measuring stick to the Rudd government on Aboriginal policies, it fails badly. At least, with the Howard regime there was no attempt to conceal their racism. They were proud of it.

“The Rudd Labor government rode to power promising so much, but has delivered so little. Aboriginal and other voters need to punish Kevin Rudd, and remind the government that they rely on the ordinary people for their survival.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to get politically active, to get involved in the campaigns for their rights, and to register and get out on election day,” Watson said.

On the question of Aboriginal people and the criminal justice system, “The lessons of the royal commission into Black deaths in custody are still being ignored,” he added. “Of the 339 recommendations of the royal commission, few have been implemented. The rate of arrests, detention and deaths in custody of Aboriginal people remain at shocking levels. In the last five weeks in Queensland, there have been four deaths in custody, of which two were Indigenous.

“Governments are privatising prisons and police watchhouses to the detriment of all prisoners. This exposes vulnerable people to even greater risk of harm,” Watson said.

“These questions of Aboriginal rights will be major issues for Socialist Alliance in the lead-up to the federal election later this year.

On the environmental crisis, Watson stressed that “as custodians of the land and seashore, Indigenous people have a great concern about the natural environment. We are very alarmed about the threat of climate change, and particularly here in Queensland with the danger of destruction of the Great Barrier Reef.”

Commenting on the Rudd government’s attacks on the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, Watson said, “This issue needs to be made a priority in the coming election campaign. As Indigenous people, we oppose all racist policies, including those affecting asylum seekers, who need our help.

“The Rudd government is happy to be involved in wars of aggression in foreign lands, but refuses to honor its commitments to protect the innocent victims of those wars. Australia is engaged in illegal, armed invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, but when people from those countries seek safety in our country, the government refuses to provide it.

“The rights of refugees need to be a major issue in the election campaign this year,” Watson said.

“Aboriginal people can make an impact in the federal elections, if they put up candidates, especially in the Senate. The Indigenous community is ready to embrace alternative parties, like the Greens and Socialist Alliance.

“As Socialist Alliance, nobody owns us. Our spirit is not in hock to the multinational corporations, as the major parties are. We will not compromise our principles, but will stand up for the rights of Aboriginal people, asylum seekers and ordinary working people,” Watson concluded.

Sam Watson wrote to me on April 15: “Jimmy, Clark Kent has got nothing on you.” ■

8. 2010 Federal Elections

At this time, the mining industry launched a massive media blitz against the Rudd Labor government's plans for a modest tax on mining super-profits. We responded with our own campaign to defend the tax proposal. I issued the following press release on June 3:

‘Make Rio Tinto and other mining giants pay fair tax’: Socialist candidates

“Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and other mining multinational companies have been ripping off the Australian people for years,” Sam Watson, Socialist Alliance Queensland Senate candidate, said today. “It’s high time these corporations paid their fair share of the nation’s tax burden.”

“These mining companies, in addition to getting various tax offsets that reduce their tax rate way below that paid by working people, or even some other sectors of business in this country, get billions of dollars of subsidies in fuel concessions, and infrastructure paid out of the public purse. We need to reject their tax scare campaign, and support the plan for a tax on super-profits,” Watson said.

“Let’s stand up to corporate greed: Make Rio Tinto and the other mining giants pay fair tax,” Ewan Saunders, environmental activist and SA candidate for the seat of Brisbane in the coming federal election said today. “The funds from a mining super-profit tax should be redirected to fund renewable energy sources. These polluting companies should be made to pay for their destruction of the environment and the climate.

“And we need to go further. If the mining industry was nationalised and put into public hands, governments would get all the revenue from mining. A progressive government could use the funds to help finance the massive program needed to seriously tackle the threat of disastrous climate change, together with other necessary social programs, such as public health, housing and welfare,” Saunders said.

A rally to demand mining giants pay fair tax will be held outside the offices of Rio

Tinto Coal, West Tower, 410 Ann Street, Brisbane, Tomorrow, Friday, June 4 at Noon. The rally will then march to the Sofitel Hotel, Turbot St, where Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is addressing a media conference.

'Support Sam!' Campaign rally held in West End by Jim McIlroy
(Brisbane Branch)

A Support Sam! Campaign rally, in the form of a street gathering, took place on the morning of Saturday August 1, at The Lizard, Boundary Street, West End, to officially launch Sam Watson's campaign as Socialist Alliance lead candidate for the Senate from Queensland. Sam, as well as SA candidate for the seat of Brisbane Ewan Saunders, and Revolutionary Socialist Party candidate for Griffith Hamish Chitts, spoke to a group of around 20 people, together with the nearby coffee-drinkers of Boundary Street and passers-by.

Sam urged the community to vote for SA and other parties which stand for progress and social justice. Hundreds of leaflets for the Queensland Senate campaign were handed out to people walking by, a number of whom stopped to listen. A Youtube video of the rally will be available shortly.

The rally was a prelude to an SA/Resistance Election Forum, under the theme, Always Was, Always Will Be, Aboriginal Land: The struggle for Aboriginal rights, being held on Tues August 3 at the Brisbane Activist Centre.

Letterboxing of the electorate is going full steam ahead, and we are starting to get some media bites. Any members or supporters in Brisbane, who would like to help out with the campaign, phone Jim on 3831 2644 or 0423 741 734.

Another letter to Coral, August 17:

You may have left Caracas already by the time you get this. Best wishes for your exciting trip to Easter Island. Say hello to all the Malcolm Fraser statues for me.

The election is in five days. Am looking forward to it all being over, and hoping like hell that the Mad Monk Abbott doesn't win.

And again on August 18:

You must be feeling mixed emotions about leaving Venezuela again. It is your second home now.

The election looks like a cliff-hanger. We are working hard for SA, and getting some good feedback. If Abbott wins, maybe you should just stay on Easter Island with all the Malcolm Fraser monuments!

A reply from Coral on August 18:

I am staying at a fancy hotel close to the airport as I have to get up again at 4.30am. I have access to the internet here. AND I HAVE HAD A VERY HOT SHOWER AND

A GOOD SLEEP SO I FEEL LIKE A NEW WOMAN AGAIN. That is not meant to be in capitals, but I hit the wrong button. I will write now, as it is very expensive on Easter Island.

I thought Julia Gillard would win the elections easily. I don't think I could bear it if the Mad Monk got in. After Venezuela and all the socialist talk on radio and TV, it will be very hard to take. I suppose Venezuela is my second home now.

I think I have finally got the biochemistry out of my blood, and I will concentrate on my book on science. I think also I could write a book about Venezuela, more of a personal story, a bit like that book on Brazil.

Watching Telesur, all day and night in the hotel. I think of all our adventures together in Latin America. I had a great weekend with Andres Eloy and his family in a beautiful valley near Montalban in the state of Carabobo, in a little pueblo called Aguirre, near Bejumo.

Before I left Alexis and Daniel sent me nice messages. Everyone asks after you and sends their best wishes.

I sent a message to SA supporters in Brisbane on August 22:

Dear friends,

Well, the election is over, and the horse-trading has just begun to form a new government. But one thing is for sure: the Greens have had a huge win, in the Senate and in the House as well.

Congratulations to all our members and supporters who helped out during the Socialist Alliance campaign, especially on polling day itself. We are still gathering information on our votes, and need to make a thorough assessment of the results and their meaning, and on our tasks in the next period.

We had a great Election Nite Party last night, attended by up to 40 comrades.

A Brisbane Branch Co-ordinating Committee meeting will be held this coming Tuesday, August 24, at 6pm at the Activist Centre, in preparation for a big Election Assessment Public Forum the following Tuesday August 31, at 6.30pm, at the centre.

All welcome to attend this Tuesday to join in the discussion,

In solidarity,

Jim Mc.

SA Brisbane co-convenor

Then a message to SA comrades about the narrow Labor win in the 2010 federal elections, August 25:

Dear comrades,

I agree with a *GLW* cover highlighting the election result, given all the discussion in the community at present. Whether we use the term "Greenslide" or not, we do need to

feature the overall reality of the election vote, which the mainstream media do not focus on: ALP 38%, -5.4%; Coalition 44%, +1.9%; Greens 11.5%, +3.7%; Others 6.5%, -0.2%.

What this means is that there was no huge swing to the Coalition over the whole country, less than 2%. In Australian political terms, the swing to the Greens of nearly 4% is historically a "landslide".

In the seat of Brisbane, Greens candidate Andrew Bartlett gained 21%, a swing of almost 10%, compared to only 31% for the Labor candidate, a drop of over 12% on the last election. The experience of our polling booth workers on the 24 booths we covered in that electorate in relations with the Greens poll workers was overwhelmingly positive. I myself sold seven *GLWs* to most of the Greens hander-outers on my booth during the day, and they were generally very supportive of Sam Watson's campaign in the Senate, and interested in our Climate Charter.

We have organised a forum featuring our SA candidate Ewan Saunders and Andrew Bartlett on a Green and Socialist view of the election result at the Activist Centre in two weeks. There is no doubt that, while experiences with the Greens is uneven around the country, and that they face a big challenge now of being pressured into unacceptable compromises, faced with nine senators and balance of power in that chamber, we need to relate more to the Greens in future. And that includes continuing to pressure them to the left.

For me, the future of progressive and left politics in this country, and around the world, must lie in some form of Socialist-Green alliance, and eventually some kind of political amalgamation. The current political and ecological crisis demands this solution in the end. Meanwhile, we should be open-minded, while principled, in relating the present Greens party here and now, with the realisation that many changes, including probably faction struggles and possibly splits lie ahead for them.

We are now at the beginning of a serious discussion in SA on our tasks and perspectives in relation to the Greens from here on.

Regards,

Jim Mc.

In a letter to the family, I noted that: "Arlo has arrived early. Chantal gave birth to a baby boy in the middle of Tuesday night August 24, several weeks earlier than expected. Baby and mother are both well. Please spread the word, Jim."

Chantal sent a message on August 31 to family and friends: "Thank you for all your best wishes for our new son Arlo. He is doing well after a dose of jaundice, which he has recovered from. As his early arrival took us off guard, we are taking a bit of time to settle in. We will love to have visitors soon."

Then I received a request from young comrade Alby Dallas:

Hey Jim. I was wondering if you were still up for being interviewed. I can interview you in person if you prefer, but I was hoping I could email you the questions? The interview is part of my TAFE assignment to see how Australia has changed over the past 50 years. I will not refer to you by name in my write up and the questions are quite generic.

I agreed. The answers to Alby's questionnaire were as follows:

1. I was born in Melbourne in 1946.
2. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, English and Scottish forebears.
3. Currently, I reside with my 22-year-old daughter.
4. Yes, birthdays, with dinners or parties, no religious holidays.
5. Leisure time? Walking several times a week, watching football on TV, sometimes movies, in my youth I used to play tennis and hockey. I like travelling to exotic lands if possible.
6. I eat much less meat than I used to. My daughter is a good vegetarian cook, whereas I am no cook at all.
7. Access to university education was more restricted in the 1960s, when I went to uni. On the other hand, there was the Commonwealth Scholarship system, which provided free education, with a means-tested allowance, followed by a period of relatively free tertiary education introduced by the Whitlam Labor government.
8. My first full-time job was as a humanities teacher at a Melbourne technical school.
9. Best memories of Australia are of family life, friends and of my colleagues in my political campaigns.
10. Being conscripted in 1966, but managing to stay out of the army through study, thus avoiding being sent to the Vietnam War. Joining the socialist movement in 1971.
11. Australian society is indeed the "lucky country". However, it has some deep-seated problems, based on class, race and sex divisions, caused by capitalism. It requires a thoroughgoing transformation to socialism
12. Australian traditions have changed to some extent, but not enough. Migration has made Australian society more pluralistic in its culture, which is good. However, the racist history of the country continues to be a deep and divisive factor. The great history of a strong union movement has been reduced in recent years, unfortunately.
13. Social norms have changed over the years, for example, support for women's and homosexual equality, as well as Aboriginal rights. However, we still have along way to go in achieving full rights for women, gays and Aboriginal people.
14. Significant social changes have occurred, as above. Certainly, the stifling social conformity of the 1950s has lessened, tolerance of differences has increased. These

social gains have only been made because of mass struggles by people's movements. Awareness on the environment has certainly increased, but this only emphasises the fact that the crisis we face is more drastic than before. The challenge now is to build an environmental and social justice movement which can succeed in carrying through even more significant, and permanent, changes.

Collingwood premiers!

In late 2010, Collingwood were finally looking good for the AFL premiership, after a painful, 20-year-long wait for the faithful Magpie supporters.

Nervously, I watched on TV in Brisbane, first the Magpies' excruciating draw against St Kilda, and then the joy of victory in the Grand Final replay. I wrote on October 2:

Victory for Collingwood, a win for the working class.

David Lowe replied:

You are confused comrade.

Eddie McGuire is working class?????????

An old Ethiopian proverb says:

"When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts."

Duroyan Fertl, another Magpie die-hard wrote:

Carn the Pies!!!

20 years too long! Good old Collingwood forever!! We are the champions, etc.

But Jim, there are those amongst us (more fool them) who do not agree that a victory for Collingwood is a victory for the working class. Worse — some of them believe things to the contrary.

In the interests of left unity, I therefore — grudgingly, and humbly — suggest that such a call for Collingwood Pies-ness and the celebration of Collingvictory perhaps isn't something which belongs in the ambit of the Socialist Alliance per se, but rather, like religion (only more important) should remain the realm of the individual and his or her peers.

Also: The premiership's a cake-walk, for the good old Collingwood!!

Comrade Pat Brewer replied on October 3:

A victory for any distorted capitalist sports enterprise marketed as grassroots community sports, despite historical illusions in the eyes of their supporters.

Dave Kerin added:

Yes Jim! All that incremental revolutionary work and, guess what, sometimes it breaks out in insurrectionary grandeur.

Coral returns

On November 10, I advertised an event to welcome Coral back to Brisbane:

Coral Wynter, who has been living in Venezuela for 6 months this year, is coming back to Brisbane for a visit. Come to a BBQ and party to welcome her back. Hear her stories about revolutionary Venezuela today.

Public forum:

VENEZUELA: THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

An Eyewitness Report

Speaker: Coral Wynter, recently returned from six months living in Caracas, will discuss the progress and challenges facing the Bolivarian Revolution, which has transformed the face of Venezuela for more than 10 years, under the leadership of socialist president Hugo Chavez.

“The Venezuelan Revolution continues to make progress, in the face of constant challenges, and some setbacks,” explains Coral Wynter, a well-known Latin America solidarity activist who recently returned to Brisbane after six months living and working in the Venezuelan capital Caracas. Her talk will examine the development of the Bolivarian Revolution, which has transformed the face of Venezuela, under the leadership of socialist President Hugo Chavez, over the past 10 years.

Wynter will describe some of the practical problems facing the government in the area of public health and tertiary education, and the difficulties posed by the constant propaganda onslaught waged by the right-wing media, both in Venezuela and abroad. It was these kinds of distortions and attacks, together with real issues of bureaucracy and corruption, which contributed to the mixed results gained by pro-Chavez United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) candidates in the September National Assembly elections, she said.

While the PSUV won a majority of NA seats, it failed to gain a two-thirds majority, which would facilitate passing crucial new laws proposed by the president. Nevertheless, the government is still pushing ahead with important measures and steps to strengthen the popular power process central to the Bolivarian Revolution.

“These problems confronting the revolution serve to emphasise the objective difficulties facing any social transformation, especially in a Third World country, under imperialist attack and de-stabilisation,” Wynter says. “But you can daily see the spirit and determination of the Venezuelan people to ensure that there will be ‘No return to the past’.”

Wynter’s talk will be accompanied by a photo presentation, illustrating some aspects of the popular struggle toward social transformation, which is a leading force

against US and Western domination in Latin America and around the world today. Then my plans for the summer of 2010-11 were set. I reported on December 3:

Dear Brisbane comrades,

Following last night's discussion on personnel on the SA National Executive, for people's information, my initial plans for 2011 are the following:

In Melbourne, Dec 15 to Dec 22; in Sydney from then until around Feb 20 or so; back to Brisbane in time for O-Week, starting Mon Feb 21 at UQ; then mostly in Bris for rest of 2011, with trips to Sydney occasionally.

Regards,

Jim Mc.

Then, an invitation to my big birthday event:

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO:

JIM MCILROY'S 65TH BIRTHDAY PARTY

When? SAT FEB 12, from 7pm.

Where? 44 Shepherd St, Chippendale, Sydney.

Featuring: Carousing, music and talking. Delicious food and drinks available, with proceeds to the Green Left Weekly Fund Appeal.

Phone: 02 8021 6671 or 0423 741 734 for more details.

I had my big 65th birthday party at Shepherd Street on February 12, 2011. It so happened that the Arab Spring had broken out, and Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign on that very day.

Around that time, my deceased father Ian's partner Estelle died in Melbourne. Her son Steve asked me to MC the funeral service there, which I was happy to do. My sister Fran and I flew down to Melbourne for the ceremony.

Green Left's 20th anniversary

I sent out a request for greetings to *Green Left* Brisbane supporters on February 8:

Dear friends and comrades,

This coming issue, number 867, marks the 20th anniversary of the foundation of *Green Left Weekly* newspaper, in February 1991. We are seeking messages of greetings from people from the progressive, union and solidarity movements to note this important occasion in the left and green publishing history of this country.

If you are able to send a greeting, please forward by return email asap to me and I will pass it on to the *GLW* Editorial Board for publication in the coming issue.

Thanks and best regards,

Jim McIlroy

A reply from longstanding Brisbane supporter Gary MacLennan:

Congratulations to *Green Left Weekly*. For 20 years you have defiantly kept alive the hope for a better world by promoting progressive and non-sectarian politics in the face of a time of decadence and, often brutal, reaction. We are all in your debt.

And from brother Sam Watson on February 9:

Jimmy,

At a time when masses of workers are rising up across the globe to fight for and defend their basic freedoms, it is critical that we have truly independent news outlets like the *GLW* to carry the truth and the reality and the humanity of these struggles to the broader community. Across these past two decades I have watched as the *GLW* has grown and strengthened its fearless voice. We do not have too many readers at the big end of corporate Australia, we don't have too many readers in Canberra or in George Street; but it is the workers going home on the trains and on the buses and in their motor cars, who are buying the latest edition of their paper — to see the truth and to share the passion and the vision.

Sam Watson

Brisbane Murri worker

The following week, I was back in Brisbane from Sydney:

GLW 20th anniversary party by Jim McIlroy, Brisbane branch

Brisbane branch of SA and Resistance celebrated the 20th anniversary of *Green Left Weekly* in style with a party at the Activist Centre on Saturday February 19. Around 40 people attended the event, which featured excellent music, food, drinks and greetings, plus a display of back issues of *GLW* going back to Number 1, February 18, 1991.

"The 20th anniversary of *Green Left* is an important event in Australian radical politics," Sam Watson, Murri activist and long-time SA member, told the audience. "On behalf of our mob, we thank everyone who has been involved in the *GLW* project over the years."

Tamil activist Gobi said that, "SA and *Green Left Weekly* have always been very supportive of the Tamil struggle. Congratulations to *GLW* for its ongoing coverage."

Jim McIlroy gave a toast to *Green Left's* 20th birthday, and recounted the origins of the paper, and its development.

Connie, Chris Anderson and friends, playing as the Zebra Lounge Mark 1, plus Steve Towson and Ness, provided great music for the night. And tasty food was prepared by Marg Gleeson and Deibehl.

Around \$200 was raised during the evening for the GLW 2011 Fighting Fund.

Then I reported on the SA state conference:

'Another Australia is Possible': SA Qld state conference held in Brisbane by Jim McIlroy, Brisbane

"Another Australia is Possible" was the main theme of the Socialist Alliance Queensland State Conference, held on Saturday April 16 in the Brisbane Activist Centre. Around 40 people attended the conference, which took place over three sessions from 1 to 6pm, including some members hooking in on-line from regional Queensland.

The opening feature panel was entitled: Fighting for Another Australia, including talks from Murri community leader Sam Watson; Sri Lankan human rights activist Dr Brian Senewiratne; socialist educationalist and writer Gary MacLennan; and Socialist Alliance National Executive representative Lisa Macdonald.

Sam Watson highlighted the ongoing campaign around Aboriginal deaths in custody, and the call for an audit of all 99 deaths which have occurred since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 20 years ago. He noted that, "Without the support of SA and others we would never have achieved the charging of Chris Hurley [over the death on Palm Island of Mulrunji Doomadgee]."

Brian Senewiratne spoke about the appalling condition of the public health system in Australia, from his extensive experience as a visiting physician in regional hospitals. He also exposed the continuing human rights violations of the Sri Lankan regime against the Tamil minority, and called for increased action to support democratic rights in Sri Lanka.

Gary MacLennan addressed the prospects for socialism in Australia, emphasising that recent world events showed that revolutions often occur suddenly after long periods of apparent stability. He stressed that left tensions inside the ALP and the Greens provided openings for SA to build a new progressive force in this country.

Lisa Macdonald pointed to the revolutionary developments in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, as a pointer toward possible future trends in Australia. She drew lessons from the recent NSW state elections, and noted "the need for socialists and the left of the Greens to work together more closely" to help construct an alternative left political option for the working class.

In the second session, entitled: Queensland Politics and Another State Election, Queensland SA state co-convenor Ewan Saunders presented an overview of the political terrain, including the possibility of an early state election. He noted the danger of a win to the Liberal-National Party under new leader Campbell Newman, citing the recent experience of the incoming O'Farrell conservative regime in NSW.

He underlined the splits within state Labor, and possibility of an Independent

Labour Party emerging. He outlined key issues, needing policy development by SA in Queensland, on anti-privatisation; public transport; action on climate change; Indigenous issues and many other issues.

Union activist Marg Gleeson spoke about the key role of trade unions in supporting social movements. She urged improved organisation of SA's union work in Queensland.

The final session on Building the Socialist Movement in Queensland in 2011 began with a report by SA state co-convenor Jim McIlroy, discussing activities by SA so far this year; the membership and reach-out drive which has increased total state financial membership to almost 100; the key tasks of raising sales and subscriptions of *GLW*; the need for improved finances, including the launch of a Special SA State Election Fund; and initial proposals for developing the coming Queensland election campaign, including endorsement of candidates.

Reports were also given by Phil Golby from Gladstone, and David Lowe from Townsville, outlining problems and prospects for regional branch building.

Finally, elections were held for the positions of state co-convenors; Queensland national executive reps; and the Brisbane Branch Co-ordinating Committee.

All in all, the reports were informative, and the discussion lively, over the course of the afternoon. In addition, several hundred dollars were raised for the state election fund and the *Green Left Weekly* fund drive.

We then held a forum on the Labor Party, using my pamphlet as a basis.

Next I made plans for a trip north to Cairns and other towns to visit comrades there.

The trip later in 2011 was very successful and enjoyable, with visits to SA members along the Queensland central-north coast. It was also a welcome holiday for myself, and an interesting experience of the famous "tilt train" from Brisbane to Cairns.

Why 'ecosocialism'

I submitted the following contribution on December 5 to the Pre-Conference Discussion leading up to the SA National Conference in early 2012:

Why we need an 'ecosocialist' movement by Jim McIlroy, Brisbane SA

In the Brisbane Socialist Alliance Branch Pre-Conference Discussion recently, there was some discussion over the usefulness of the concept of "ecosocialism" as a vehicle for building the socialist movement today. I would like to defend the assertion that the

term “ecosocialism” is now a vital instrument for reconstructing a mass socialist movement in the current world political situation.

The main problem faced by the socialist/Marxist movement right now is not whether or not Marx and Engels sufficiently analysed, or emphasised, ecological questions in their theoretical analysis of class society and history, but the fact that socialism/Marxism is now a tiny current in the international political scene. Historical questions, such as the fact that Stalinism, not Marxism, is responsible for the degeneration and collapse of the Soviet Union, are important, but not the key issue facing us at present.

The problem is how do we regenerate the whole idea of socialism as a genuine, mass-based alternative in the international, and Australian, political debate. Any vehicle, even if merely a new and appealing way of presenting the socialist alternative to a mass audience, is to be welcomed. “Eco-socialism” is one new way to insert socialism/Marxism into the mainstream context, particularly in the advanced capitalist countries.

Another brilliant innovation for renewing the whole idea of socialism in the contemporary world is Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez’ call for “Socialism of the 21st Century”. This theme effectively sets apart the idea of Bolivarian socialism — ie, a socialist revolution based on popular democratic participation, as contrasted to the bureaucratic “socialism” of the Soviet bloc in the latter 20th century — and has immense appeal to the Latin American masses yearning to be free of US imperialism and the domination of the local oligarchies.

Yet, even in this case, the ecological-indigenous socialist movement of Bolivia, led by President Evo Morales, has added further enrichment to the Latin American revolutionary movement which is sweeping that continent at present. The Bolivian innovation of implementing a constitutional guarantee of the Rights of Mother Earth, in addition to the social rights of the people, is a ground-breaking concept within the worldwide debate over climate change and the growing environmental crisis.

The Latin American revolutionary movement, led by the ALBA countries, is now a leading force not only in renovating revolutionary-democratic socialism, but ecological socialism as well. The concept of “ecosocialism” effectively seeks to link the two aspects of an essential revolutionary solution to the “ecocapitalist” crisis.

All this is not to say in the least that new terminology can instantly solve the problem of reformism versus revolution, within the progressive movement today. Of course, some who might profess to identify with “ecosocialism” will continue to be sheep in wolves’ clothing — the “socialis”, indeed even “Marxist”, movement, has historically been plagued with reformism in revolutionary guise.

We will continue to have to fight for revolutionary-Marxist, class-struggle politics

within any mass-based “ecosocialist” movement. But “ecosocialism” provides a useful tool toward linking up the genuine socialist current with what is a real mass movement in the world today, the environmental movement.

In the excellent pamphlet, *How to Make an Ecosocialist Revolution*, published recently by Resistance Books, Ian Angus notes that: “The lesson that we must learn from [the achievements] and environmental failures of socialism in the 20th century is that ecology must have a central place in socialist theory, in the socialist program and in the activity of the socialist movement.

“Ecosocialism works to unite the best of the green and the red while overcoming the weaknesses of each. It tries to combine Marxism’s analysis of human society with ecology’s analysis of our relationship to the rest of nature ...

“A sentence in John Belamy Foster’s *The Ecological Rift* precisely and concisely explains ecosocialism’s reason for being.

“There can be no true ecological revolution that is not socialist; no true socialist revolution that is not ecological.”

It is this dialectical reality which underlies the vital role the concept of ecosocialism can play in building a mass-based movement for “Socialism of the 21st Century”.

2011 Year in Review: Recessions, Revolts and Revolutions by Jim McIlroy, Brisbane

[The following contribution is adapted from a report entitled, “2011 in Review: Year of the 99%: Recessions, Revolts and Revolutions”, presented to Brisbane Branch of SA on December 13.]

International situation: 2011, a year of democratic revolt

The world context for this year has been set, on the one hand by the international capitalist recession, and on the other by the international, popular upsurge for democratic rights and against corporate power.

This democratic revolt has swept the planet, from Third World to advanced capitalist countries, reflecting the demands of the 99% for real, popular democracy.

The year began with the Arab Spring, which exploded in January in Tunisia, and continued into February-March in Egypt and elsewhere. The Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorships were toppled, and popular challenges launched against the Western-backed regimes in Yemen and Bahrain.

In Libya, the democratic movement was taken over by the NATO military intervention, resulting in the installation of a pro-Western government. However, the final balance of forces there is still not certain. In Syria, the popular upsurge has

faced intense government repression, and the political trajectory of the movement is not clear at this stage.

But it must be remembered that the background to the Arab Spring is the ongoing struggle of the Palestinian people for their national rights, in the face of brutal repression from Israel and its US backer. The Palestinian Intifadas should be understood as the original source of the democratic revolution in the Middle East as a whole.

In Europe, the continent has been wracked with economic and social crisis throughout this year as well. The European Community is now in deep crisis, with the major powers determined to impose drastic neoliberal solutions on the smaller countries and their working classes, and on the working people of the entire region.

The heroic resistance of the Greek people against the austerity program forced on them by the European rulers, and the banks, with the collaboration of their own government, has been an inspiration to people around the world. Other countries, including Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Italy have seen big mobilisations against recession and austerity as well. In Britain, the students and then the unions have campaigned against the attacks of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat regime.

In Spain, the massive occupations of the country's plazas by the Indignados movement has been fuelled by anger at austerity, mass youth unemployment and disillusionment in the mainstream political parties. Europe goes into 2012 facing further economic recession and political instability.

Across the Atlantic, the financial crisis of 2008-9 has deepened into a serious recession. Official US politics has reached a stalemate, with President Obama and the Democrats in deadlock with the Republicans, in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential elections.

Nevertheless, the two capitalist parties have united to impose ever more drastic cuts in social spending, and attacks on workers' rights in the US. These escalating attacks, the public bail-out of the banks while American families are increasingly evicted from their homes, and the widespread anger at corporate greed have created a new, questioning mood in the country.

This combined with massive opposition to the US war in Afghanistan has generated the basis for the new Occupy Wall Street movement, which has shaken up the system. At the very least, it has helped to "change the public conversation" in the country. The far-right Tea Party has been pushed off the front pages, at least temporarily, by the Occupy movement, and its challenge on behalf of the 99% to the greed and power of the 1%.

As Tariq Ali noted in an article entitled, "Occupy challenge to the greedy rulers of the world", printed in the November 16, 2011, *Green Left Weekly*, "The young people

being pepper sprayed by the New York police may not have worked out what they want, but they sure as hell know what they are against, and that's an important start."

Meanwhile, the issue of WikiLeaks, and the attacks on Bradley Manning and Julian Assange, reflect the fear of these rulers of public revelations of their international war crimes and economic schemes. Increased popular knowledge means rising popular resistance.

On the other side of the ledger, the deepening people's revolutions in Latin America, led by Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba, are showing an alternative path to capitalist neoliberalism. The struggle for Socialism of the 21st Century is a beacon for peoples, not only of the Third World but of the advanced capitalist countries as well.

Australian political situation

In Australia, the Gillard Labor government is pushing ever further to the right. The ALP seems determined to compete with ultra-conservative Coalition leader Tony Abbott, in a race to the bottom of the country's politics.

On asylum seekers, the government's failed "Malaysia solution" is an attempt to head off the Coalition's racist "stop the boats at any cost" line. Neither mainstream party will countenance any retreat from the brutal policy of mandatory detention.

On economic policy, Gillard has severely watered down the mining tax. And both parties are competing to impose cutbacks in social spending and the public sector.

On climate change, the government's carbon tax package is no solution. The ALP refuses to accept the urgent need for massive public investment in renewable energy as the only way forward in combatting the looming climate emergency.

More recently, the ALP decision to authorise uranium sales to India is a further back-down to market forces. And Gillard's kowtowing to President Obama during his visit in November, and the announcement of a huge new US military base in the NT, is a clear sign of this government's commitment to the escalating US war drive in the Asia-Pacific region.

The prospect of likely Coalition governments in the next couple of years, both federally and in Queensland, will merely accelerate this headlong push to the right. In this context, the need to popularise a genuine, progressive alternative is more urgent than ever.

The Greens offer a partial step forward in this situation. But the parliamentarist focus of the Greens limits the extent they can offer such an alternative. And their collaboration with Labor governments has compromised them even further in a number of areas.

Nevertheless, alternative campaigns offering a challenge to the two-party control

of Australian politics are developing. This fight back is in its early stages, but is significant for the future.

On the keynote issue of Coal Seam Gas, the burgeoning Lock the Gate Alliance represents a novel union of farmers and environmentalists with significant potential to change the political scene. The challenge is to build the movement in the cities as well as the countryside, helping to cut across the traditional urban-rural division in Australian politics.

In the industrial arena, the Labor government has amended Howard's anti-union Work Choices legislation, but kept major aspects of it in Fair Work Australia. The retention of the ABCC in another form is an ongoing threat to the building unions.

On the other hand, the Qantas, Baiada and other workers have shown the willingness to fight is still strong. And the partial victory of the ASU Equal Pay Campaign is another sign of hope for the class-struggle spirit in the union movement.

The refugee rights campaign is rebuilding after a temporary decline from 2007, and increasing its pressure on the ALP government. While the anti-war movement is limited at present, a huge, passive sentiment against the war in Afghanistan persists.

The BDS campaign in support of Palestinian rights has shown significant growth this year, in the face of relentless attacks and some setbacks. And public support for WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange is strong, although not particularly active for the time being.

It is in this context that the necessity of building a progressive, mass-based political alternative force is clear. That process is still in its early stages as we go into 2012.

Socialist Alliance work in 2011

The Socialist Alliance project is essentially aimed toward rebuilding a strong socialist movement in Australia. We are beginning the process of attempting to construct a broad-based, socialist party on a class-struggle program.

Our aim is to recruit to SA and Resistance and train new members to develop as activists in the movements and in carrying out our organisational tasks. We seek to be involved in the key mass movements, as best we can, given available resources and priorities.

We fight for class-struggle politics in the social movements, and seek to bring people in struggle toward a socialist understanding. In the process, we seek to avoid both opportunist and sectarian tendencies.

We also work to carry out socialist education for members, and interested supporters. By this combination of work, SA aims for a balanced program of political activity, discussion and education.

Overall, Socialist Alliance nationally has sought to carry out these tasks during 2011, with reasonable success in mass movement work, recruitment and integration, distribution of our socialist paper *Green Left Weekly*, fundraising, and internal activities.

Brisbane SA Branch work in 2011

Our branch work during this year has shown some significant successes, as well as areas which could improve in 2012.

Sales of *Green Left Weekly* have in general been good, with our bundle target being sold out most weeks during the year. Participation has been uneven, however, which indicates a significant potential for expansion next year.

Recruitment to Brisbane branch SA has been positive in 2011, as well as retention, with an overall gain in membership since this time last year. The challenge now is to involve many members more deeply in the work of the organisation and the mass movements.

Brisbane Resistance branch has also experienced a lively end to the year in particular, with significant prospects for development in 2012.

On socialist education, the monthly Socialist Ideas Discussion Groups have been fruitful this year. More regular class discussion series are needed in the coming year.

In the area of mass movement work, Brisbane branch has achieved positive results, with significant room for improvement in future. In particular, the anti-Coal Seam Gas campaign, the WikiLeaks defence group, and Occupy Brisbane have been priorities recently.

We have also been involved in Justice for Palestine and the BDS campaign; the refugee rights movement; and in a supporting role in the women's movement and the Equal Marriage Rights campaign.

In the unions, we have had significant success in limited sectors.

A major challenge for us in 2012 will be the Queensland state election. We have so far endorsed Mike Crook as SA candidate for the seat of Sandgate, and are currently considering other options, partly depending on when the election is called.

We look forward to a successful 8th National Conference of Socialist Alliance in January, in Sydney, and to a challenging and busy year of activity and gains in 2012.

Queensland elections

Brisbane SA prepares for state election campaign by Jim McIlroy, SA Newsletter, February 6, 2012

Brisbane branch of Socialist Alliance is raring to go with the upcoming Queensland state election campaign, due on March 24. Beginning with a very successful and enthusiastic branch meeting on January 31, attended by more than 20 people, we have started to organise our campaign to put socialism on the map in the election.

We have endorsed two excellent candidates, Mike Crook for the northern beach electorate of Sandgate, and Liam Flenady, for the inner suburban seat, just south of the Brisbane River, South Brisbane, held by Labor Premier Anna Bligh. We are currently preparing our mass-distribution leaflet for letterboxing, to start in two weeks time, on the weekend of February 18-19.

First major event of the SA program will be the launch of Liam's campaign at The Lizard, Boundary St, West End, on Sat February 25, by Murri leader and SA member Sam Watson. This will be followed by a launch of Mike's campaign in Sandgate on Sun March 4, and a campaign BBQ for South Brisbane in Orleigh Park, West End, on Sun March 11.

There will also be a public meeting to launch the whole SA campaign at the Brisbane Activist Centre on Tues March 6. Street stalls and letterboxing mobilisations will be organised every weekend during the campaign, culminating in the huge mobe of SA members and supporters for polling day, Sat March 24, and a campaign election night party that evening.

We will also hold a major fundraising social event during the campaign to raise much-needed funds. All offers of support, personal or financial, are very welcome!

For more information on the SA Queensland state election campaign, contact Jim on 07 3831 2644/0423 741 734, or visit <http://socialistalliance-brisbane.blogspot.com>.

Venezuela film launched

Finally, Katrina's much anticipated film was launched.

New Australian-made Venezuela solidarity film: *Chasing Chavez*
by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, February 13, 2012

Chasing Chavez, directed by Brisbane filmmaker Katrina Channells, recounts the story

of Venezuela solidarity activist and Australian Socialist Alliance member Coral Wynter, and her quest to present President Hugo Chavez with a copy of her co-authored book, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution* (Resistance Books, Sydney 2008). The film, 60 minutes long, highlights the people's revolution sweeping Venezuela and the need for international solidarity.

The film tells the saga of Wynter's determined efforts to meet with President Chavez during her stay in Venezuela in 2008-9, and her desire to communicate with the leader of the Bolivarian revolution about the development of a growing international solidarity movement with the Venezuelan people, even in a far-away, English-speaking country like Australia.

The film effectively presents the personal story of Wynter's longstanding connection with Venezuela, going back to the 1970s, and her more recent involvement in helping to organise solidarity brigades, under the auspices of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), as the foreground for depicting the reality of Venezuela today: people's power, organised through communal councils, health and educational social missions, and the Bolivarian project of using Venezuela's vast oil wealth for the benefit of the poor majority, rather than US imperialism and the entrenched traditional oligarchy.

Stunning cinematography, humour and the warmth and generosity of the ordinary Venezuelan people shine through in this movie. Being premiered in Brisbane in late February, and following that in other Australian cities.

Check the AVSN website (www.venezuelasolidarity.org) for details.

Next, a most unusual report in the Murdoch press:

Unlikely allies wave their banners high by Andrew Fraser, *The Australian*, February 21, 2012

These are strange times indeed when Bob Katter kisses a Greens senator.

But yesterday in 39C heat at Jondaryan on the Darling Downs, they were only a part of one of the oddest collections of political interests ever to share the back of a truck.

Alan Jones did his Sydney radio show yesterday morning then flew up to the area where he was born; Mr Katter and his Katter Australian Party were there in their big red bus, the Katmobile; Greens senator Larissa Waters was there; even the Socialist Alliance, albeit with signs in the crowd rather than on the stage.

The stickers on the backs of cars of people at the rally also reflected this diversity: alongside "Stop Coal-Seam Gas Mining" and "Keep Felton Green" was one featuring an Australian flag with the notation: "If you don't love it, LEAVE!"

Stuart Munckton noted in the February 24 *GLW* that the “*The Australian* editorial on February 22, in defence of the CSG industry, starts with this line: ‘Something is badly amiss when Queensland bushies embrace *Green Left Weekly* ...’”

Brisbane premiere: *Chasing Chavez* hits the big screen by Jim McIlroy, *Green Left Weekly*, March 1

BRISBANE — The Brisbane premiere of the new Venezuela solidarity film, *Chasing Chavez*, hit the big screen at the Schonell Cinema, University of Queensland, on February 29. Almost 70 people attended the launch of the hour-long doco, and applauded director Katrina Channells and co-producer and cinematographer Nik Lachajczak for their fine work.

Chasing Chavez recounts the story of Venezuela solidarity activist and Australian Socialist Alliance member Coral Wynter, and her quest to present President Hugo Chavez with a copy of her co-authored book, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution* (Resistance Books, Sydney 2008). The film highlights the people's revolution sweeping Venezuela and the need for international solidarity.

The film tells the saga of Wynter's determined efforts to meet with President Chavez during her stay in Venezuela in 2008-9, and her desire to communicate with the leader of the Bolivarian revolution about the development of a growing international solidarity movement with the Venezuelan people, even in a far-away, English-speaking country like Australia.

The film effectively presents the personal story of Wynter's longstanding connection with Venezuela, going back to the 1970s, and her more recent involvement in helping to organise solidarity brigades, under the auspices of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), as the foreground for depicting the reality of Venezuela today: people's power, organised through communal councils, health and educational social missions, and the Bolivarian project of using Venezuela's vast oil wealth for the benefit of the poor majority, rather than US imperialism and the entrenched traditional oligarchy.

Stunning cinematography, humour and the warmth and generosity of the ordinary Venezuelan people shine through in this movie.

Check the AVSN website (www.venezuelasolidarity.org) for details of other city showings of *Chasing Chavez*.

It's a miracle! by Jim McIlroy, Queensland SA co-convenor, March 12

The strategic alliance between socialism and liberation theology which Fidel Castro wrote about, was given another boost by the decision of Fr Terry Fitzpatrick, priest of

the famous St Mary's in Exile Catholic community in West End, Brisbane, to join Socialist Alliance on March 11. Terry, along with Fr Peter Kennedy, are the priests of St Mary's, who were expelled from the Catholic Church by the Pope several years ago for their political and doctrinal "heresies".

Since then, the St Mary's Community in Exile has held three services every weekend in the Queensland Trades and Labour Council, near the old official St Mary's Church, and has supported many progressive causes, including Aboriginal and refugee rights, opposition to war, pro-environment and social justice. People come from all over Brisbane to attend the services.

Every Sunday morning, I have been selling *Green Left Weekly* at the end of the service for more than two years. It is one of the best regular spots for sales in Brisbane, with 10 or more papers invariably sold in half an hour — a rate of 20 per hour!

Last Sunday, Terry, who always buys two papers for himself and Fr Peter, for a solidarity price, said to me: "You know, Socialist Alliance is really the party which I most identify with. How do you join?"

Luckily, I had an SA membership brochure in my back pocket, and Terry joined up on the spot. Lesson One for the SA recruitment campaign: Always carry an SA brochure with you at all times. You never know then you might need it!

PS: Also carry a *GLW* subscription card with you, because it can often come in handy too!

SA campaigns strongly in midst of ALP disaster by Jim McIlroy, Qld co-convenor, March 26

Socialist Alliance pushed ahead strongly with its campaign to put socialist politics before the Queensland electorate, as the ALP government faced annihilation in the state election held on March 24. Although everyone knew the government was unpopular, the sheer size of the LNP win took all commentators by surprise.

The political fall-out from the electoral disaster, which has left Labor with only seven or eight seats compared to the LNP's probable 78 in an 89 seat House of Assembly, after a record two-party swing of 15 per cent away from the Bligh government, will be felt for many years to come — federally as well as on a state level. For a fuller overview of the Queensland election, see next week's *Green Left Weekly*.

Meanwhile, SA held its own, and experienced a modest swing in its favor in the three seats it contested. In South Brisbane, with around 70% of the vote counted on Saturday night, our candidate Liam Flenady had gained 365 votes, or 2%. This compares with a final vote for Sam Watson, our candidate in the 2009 state election in the same seat of 275 votes, or 1.5%. The increase in 2012 is more notable given the strong

personal support for Sam as a well-known leader of the Murri community in the area.

(Which is not to say Liam didn't have a personal support base also. Several musicians in particular stated their backing for Liam on the polling booths on election day!)

Mike Crook, running for the second time in the seat of Sandgate for SA, had 347 votes, or 1.53%, on Saturday night, compared to a final total of 361, or 1.3%, in 2009. The comparison is somewhat complicated by the fact that Mike was listed at the top of the ballot this time. However, unlike in South Brisbane, SA did not distribute how-to-vote cards on the day, relying mainly on corflutes with Mike's name and photo, on A-frames around the key booths, together with a number of SA members and supporters spruiking support.

It should be noted that Socialist Alliance is not yet a registered party in Queensland, so our party name was not listed on the ballot paper beside the candidates' names. Registration in Queensland remains a major task for the future here.

In the north Queensland seat of Dalrymple, Jason Briskey, running for the first time as a candidate for SA, had received 110 votes, or 0.6%, at close of counting on March 24. While this figure is modest, Jason also did not have the resources to distribute how-to-vote cards on the day. He relied on travelling around booths in the area near Charters Towers, and talking to voters.

SA mobilised around 40 members and supporters to staff polling booths in Brisbane on election day, with around 60 being actively involved in the whole campaign, via letterboxing etc. This year, with the printing of corflutes with the SA logo and candidates' names on, we were also able to put signs in supporters' windows and front gardens for the first time in an election campaign here.

In South Brisbane, we staffed most of the booths, except for some of the smaller ones, on election day. A number of our poll workers report people stating their intention to vote for Liam, and many useful discussions were held about our policies and platform.

On a number of the booths, we had card tables with other SA literature, including the Climate Charter and Women's Rights Charter, which were distributed to interested electors. We sold more than 30 *GLWs* on the day.

We also received support for being the only party to provide a full preference list on our how-to-vote card. All other parties indicated on their main cards, Just Vote 1, and choose your own preferences if you wish.

It is important to maintain our defence of the full preference system, which is more democratic than optional preferential. That system results in practice in a first-past-the-post process, similar to Britain, which means winner takes all.

In the case of Queensland 2012, it has meant a much bigger parliamentary majority for the LNP, than its first preference vote would indicate, and many fewer seats for the

ALP. Moreover, it is less favorable to smaller parties like the Greens and Socialist Alliance, as it influences voters to stick to a choice of the two mainstream parties.

Over the whole election period, we letterboxed almost all of the 10,000 campaign leaflets printed for each of Liam and Mike's campaigns, covering a majority of the residences in both electorates, over the course of a month. This included Saturday and Sunday mobilisations, with teams fanning out into the suburbs after campaign functions. Jason also distributed thousands of campaign leaflets in Dalrymple over the course of the election.

Campaign events included the official launch of Liam's campaign in South Brisbane, with around 40 people attending a rally in the main street of West End; the launch of Mike's campaign in Sandgate, with about 20 people attending; a BBQ for Liam in Orleigh Park, West End; a Meet the SA Candidates forum at the Activist Centre, sponsored by *Green Left Weekly*; and a number of campaign street stalls.

The SA candidates called two protest rallies: the first, on February 7, was outside the ANZ Bank Queensland head office in the Brisbane city, to condemn "Big Bank greed". The second, on the day before the election, March 23, was outside the Arrow Energy office in the city, to protest the company's CSG exploration permits over Brisbane's western suburbs. It attracted a number of independent activists as well as SA members.

Our candidates issued a stream of media releases in the course of the campaign: Our initial campaign announcement, "Qld needs radical change"; against Big Bank rip-offs; supporting the Qld mineworkers against BHP-Billiton; promoting Murri and SA leader Sam Watson's launch of the South Brisbane campaign; announcing Jason Briskey's candidature in Dalrymple; "No new naval base for Brisbane"; "Qld coal and CSG industries 'a cancer'"; Qld SA candidates: "Reverse the privatisation madness"; "Coal industry wrecking Queensland's future"; "Reject Katter party homophobia"; "Socialist Alliance brings change to politics"; endorsing the Brisbane Aboriginal Tent Embassy; "Qld flood inquiry ignores real issues"; "Bligh and Newman not to be trusted on coal and CSG"; and "Campbell Newman's tunnel vision".

Mike Crook received strong audience applause at a community-sponsored Meet the Candidates forum in Sandgate. Our stall promoting Liam's campaign at the big public meeting of 1000 against CSG in the Brisbane Convention Centre was popular as well.

All three candidates gained useful media coverage in local newspapers in their electorates. They were also able to do some radio interviews about the SA campaign.

At the election night party on March 24, SA members and supporters watched the ALP rout on a big screen TV, but expressed a determination to fight back against the

coming reactionary onslaught from an incoming Newman LNP government.

“Socialism has been demonised in recent decades,” Mike Crook told the audience. “But socialism is the only viable message of hope and a progressive future.

“Socialist Alliance will continue the struggle from tomorrow. The unions and the environment movement will need to mobilise to face the coming attacks.

“Tomorrow is the first day of the people's fight back in Queensland,” he said.

For more information on the Queensland SA election campaign, phone Jim on 0423 741 734 or visit: <http://socialistalliance-brisbane.blogspot.com.au>.

My background recounted

On March 28, 2012 a student named Tamara interviewed me for a university course project. There were five questions:

1. Were you raised in a religious household? If yes, please specify which religion and if you regularly attended church/synagogue/mosque.
2. What religion, if any do you practice now?
3. What protest work did you engage in during the Vietnam War?
4. Do you still protest now? If yes, what specifically and how regularly?
5. Do you feel that your religious upbringing or lack of has shaped the views you hold now towards your protesting?

I answered as follows:

1. No, my family were not religious. However, they did send me to a Church of England Grammar School in Melbourne as a teenager. This meant that I was brought into contact with Christianity, but eventually I decided I did not believe in God. I did occasionally attend the small church in our suburb with my grandmother at one stage, mostly because I liked (and still do) the religious music.
2. I don't practice any religion now, as I am an atheist and a socialist. I believe we must base our lives on humanist ethics, derived from the desire to improve the existence of humanity and nature on this planet right now, rather than a mythical afterlife.
3. I was conscripted to join the army in 1966 when I was at Melbourne University. I refused to go into the military to kill the people of Vietnam. I was able to obtain deferments of the draft each year by continuing my course at uni. I spent the next five years helping to organise protests and demonstrations against the Vietnam War, leading up to the big Moratorium marches in 1970-71, which forced the federal Liberal government to eventually withdraw the troops from Vietnam.
4. Yes, I am involved in many protests. I attend, and often help to organise, quite a

number of protests in Brisbane where I now live, and have retired from work. Issues most recently include supporting the refugees; environmental causes such as opposition to mining for coal and Coal Seam Gas; solidarity with the people of Palestine; union rights; and defence of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. I probably attend a protest rally or public meeting at least once a week.

5. The experience of attending a religious school probably helped turn me against organised religion. However, I recognise Christ's teaching as a good example of a humane, secular set of ethical principles. I hope that such ethical principles underlie my support for equality, justice and a fair go, and for a better, more humane and environmentally sustainable society. I protest because our current system is unjust and unsustainable. Overall, it was probably my parents' humanistic outlook that shaped my support for political protests more than any religious influence.

We then held a Queensland SA State Conference, which was to be my last before my permanent return to Sydney:

Qld SA Conference discusses way forward for socialism by Jim McIlroy, Brisbane, May 21

The Socialist Alliance Queensland 2012 State Conference was held at the Brisbane Activist Centre on May 19, attended by more than 40 members and supporters. Under the general theme, "Towards a Socialist Australia", the conference discussed rebuilding the socialist movement in Australia and in Queensland, in the framework of a rise in international struggles for radical change.

Peter Boyle, SA national co-convenor, set the scene by challenging the movement to re-imagine socialism in the new period of international crisis, beginning with the polarisation in Greece faced with economic disaster. "In Greece, the appeal is to build a united front government of the left to say No to the big-business robbery.

"The crisis is much more severe than it may look from Australia at the moment," he said. "As the global crisis spreads, Australia can't escape the effects.

"We all need to support the campaign to launch our new SA document, Towards a Socialist Australia. We need a wide range of voices to be heard in this discussion. We need to imagine a whole new way of organising society, under socialism," Boyle said.

Fr Terry Fitzpatrick, from St Mary's Community in Exile, South Brisbane, told the audience, "Capitalism operates to separate us. We need to create a new society based on oneness, on co-operation.

"Institutionalised religions were formed to 'multiply and subdue the earth'. We need to return to a system based on harmony with Mother Earth," he said. He finished by playing the classic John Lennon song, *Imagine*.

Other reports were heard during the day from Dr Brian Senewiratne on the “terrible situation” in Sri Lanka, in which the oppression of the Tamil minority by the regime continues unchecked; and Murri leader Sam Watson, who reported on latest developments in the struggle to defend the Aboriginal Sovereign Embassy in Musgrave Park.

In the second session, entitled: “Taking on the new LNP (Liberal-National Party) Government: Queensland Politics Today”, Jim McIlroy presented an overview of the offensive launched by the Campbell Newman regime in its first weeks in office. He outlined the beginnings of a fightback being mounted by popular movements, and the urgent need for a united front of the left and green forces to organise a longer-term radical alternative.

Hannah Reardon-Smith summarised key campaigns under way to challenge the attacks of the Newman government. She spoke about the fight to stop the coal seam gas industry, together with other environmental campaigns. She also noted the opposition being organised against the premier's cuts to funding for the arts and social services.

Marg Gleeson addressed the challenges facing the Queensland union movement under the new LNP regime. She stressed the need for building labour movement solidarity, and called for preparations for a union fight back against inevitable attacks from the government, especially in view of the likelihood of an Abbott Liberal National government in the next year.

In the final session, “Building the Socialist Movement in Queensland”, Ewan Saunders gave a report on the challenges facing the left, and the key tasks before Socialist Alliance in building and strengthening the organisation. Dom Hale then spoke on the developing integration between Resistance and youth work and Socialist Alliance in Brisbane.

During the afternoon, reports by Skype were also heard from Phil Golby in Gladstone, and Jonathan Strauss in Cairns, about issues and prospects in those cities.

The conference ended with the election of a three-person co-convenor team for Queensland SA of Ewan Saunders, Marg Gleeson and Liam Flenady, and an eight-person Brisbane Branch Co-ordinating Committee.

Throughout the meeting, lively discussion followed each report, and overall the conference set a positive tone for the work of SA over the next 12 months.

Then, I finally ended my time in Brisbane, returning to Sydney in July 2012. The farewell party was held on July 1 in New Farm. ■

9. Return to Caracas

Towards the end of 2012, Coral and I set off for Venezuela again, to coordinate another AVSN brigade, and then to travel on through South America. Coral wrote to Katrina from Caracas:

Great to hear from you. We are going great guns. Getting a lot organised in a short time, but Jim is a bit sick. I think the long flight upset him. He keeps burping, but don't tell Chantal.

We have already given out three copies of your film to people. Ruben is trying to get it onto state television. He knows it's important to do it before the election. So here's hoping.

The people at the ALBA office watched it right through yesterday, and laughed a lot. They only found one error in the Spanish subtitles. At least the whole thing worked on their system, which was wonderful.

Hope all is well with the Melbourne family.

Good luck with the Manangrida film and other work.

A letter to family and comrades from Venezuela, September 2, 2012:

Well, we made it to Caracas, finally. Sorry for the delay in writing, but the whole trip took nearly 30 hours in all, allowing for 10 hours in the Buenos Aires airport. We arrived exhausted and retired to our hotel, The Edwards, for a rest, with the intention of going out during the Friday evening to send some email etc.

But we were waylaid by a fantastic 2-hour speech by Chavez to a mass rally of workers at La Guaira being broadcast live on TV. So we didn't get out till next morning, Saturday Sept 1.

The rally and speech seem to represent a new phase of the election campaign, with Chavez asserting the "central role of the working class in the Venezuelan revolution", and calling on all workers to become actively involved in the revolution to defeat the counter-revolution and imperialism.

We will write up an article for *GLW* next week about it.

Correspondence with Katrina about progress with distributing the Chavez film,

September 17:

Don't give up on the film yet. People we have shown it to here really enjoy it, such as some comuna members at Daniel and Joly's place yesterday. We are showing it for some Petare residents on Tuesday, and have some other possibilities, including approaching VIVE, Channel 8, Telesur, Avila and Catia TV.

We did an interview on ANTV, where some scenes from the film were shown. I would like to chase Chavez again, and get him to see it also! I'm sure he would laugh and enjoy it. Preparations for the brigade continue.

Report from Venezuela Letter from Caracas 1, September 25

Hi all,

Sorry for the delay in sending a brief report on our visit to Venezuela, but we have been very busy preparing for the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) 2012 Presidential Elections Brigade, September 27-Oct 8. Since our arrival on August 31, we have basically been running around most days meeting people, phoning up, visiting offices, etc., to arrange events for the brigade.

We did manage to fit in a quick trip to Merida, Valencia and Maracay, over four days, which was very pleasant. We are staying in a rented room in the outer Caracas suburb of Palo Verde, which fortunately is near the Metro for travel convenience.

The draft itinerary for the brigade is looking very promising, with additional events coming along as we go. It looks like being a very full agenda for the 10 days, and very exciting and educational for the 20 or so brigadistas from Australia and several other countries.

The presidential election campaign here is heating up as we go into the last couple of weeks. The campaign for re-election of socialist president Hugo Chavez is massive, with huge rallies, car and truck caravans and public meetings all over the country, almost every day.

The key issue is the continuation and consolidation of the Bolivarian Revolution and its radical program of social change, and improvements in the lives of the Venezuelan people, under Chavez' goal of Socialism of the 21st Century.

The right-wing opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski is running on a platform of neoliberal policies, effectively meaning privatisation of the state oil company PDVSA, attacks on the social missions and slashing the public sector. Sound familiar to us in Australia?

Chavez has said that Capriles wants to return Venezuela to being a "colony of the United States".

The involvement of young people in the Chavista campaign is very noticeable,

much more so in our opinion than in the previous presidential election of 2006, which we also witnessed.

Some of the brigadistas have already arrived, and the rest are coming in the next few days. So, we have to rush off to make some more preparations.

Best wishes to all,

Solidarity greetings and regards from revolutionary Venezuela,

Jim and Coral

A message to the family from Caracas, September 25.

Just a short note to say that we are well and very busy preparing for the Venezuela Presidential Elections brigade. We have been rushing around almost every day.

We have been interviewed in one of the daily papers, been on a morning TV show, with other interviews in the pipeline. We are trying to get *Chasing Chavez* shown on TV, and have been happy with the warm reception it has got when we have shown the film to Venezuelans here.

We are living with a lovely couple in the outer suburb of Palo Verde, and have been travelling around the city on the Metro every day. Looking forward to the brigade in a few days time.

A letter to Katrina, October 5.

You're somewhat famous too. Chasing Chavez has now been shown on Channel 8, Channel 2 and may be shown again on Telesur on Saturday night.

Someone in the upper echelons obviously really likes it. This is largely thanks to Coral's strenuous efforts to push the film all over the place. We should have a sequel called *Chasing Chavez: The Aftermath*.

The brigade is going well. Just attended a massive rally of millions in Caracas for the close of Chavez' campaign. See the *Green Left* website for reports.

A bit tired now, but happy.

Our South American journey

After the Venezuela brigade, I, Coral, Geoff and Marg Gleeson flew to Lima to begin our several-month-long adventure through South America. Coral and I wrote to Chantal and Katrina from Peru on October 17:

We are currently travelling by bus in southern Peru. Stayed in Arequipa last night, on to Lake Titicaca, and then to Bolivia. Having a great time, we had a couple of days in Lima, where we saw the skulls in the crypt under the St Francisco Monastery, and the rather gruesome Museum of the Inquisition, which you will remember from our 2003

family trip.

The brigade went well, although rather exhausting and challenging, but very rewarding, especially after Chavez won quite strongly in the end. We are now in the second stage of the trip, down to Iguazu Falls through Bolivia and Paraguay, with Geoff and Marg. Now surrounded by towering mountains and volcanoes, quite stunning. Looking forward to the rest of the trip.

Letters from Latin America 2012

Below are six reports on our 2012-13 Latin American adventure, beginning with the September-October 2012 AVSN Venezuela Brigade and finishing in Buenos Aires. We flew back to Australia in January 2013.

Report on AVSN 2012 Presidential Solidarity Brigade to Venezuela October 2012 by Jim McIlroy

The 18 members of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) Presidential Brigade to Venezuela, from September 27 to October 8, 2012, spent a wonderful and inspirational 12 days observing the Bolivarian revolutionary process and learning about the struggles of the Venezuelan people for Socialism of the 21st Century. A highlight of the brigade was to participate in the October 4 massive rally of three million supporters of Hugo Chavez' successful campaign for re-election as president of Venezuela in the national poll held on October 7.

The 18 participants consisted of 14 Australians, one from Greece, one from Denmark, a Mexican residing in New Zealand and a Russian-Australian. Below is a summary of the program of the brigade, including reports on particular sessions:

WED SEPT 26. Evening. Welcome dinner in a Chinese restaurant, Los Chaguaremos, Caracas.

THURS SEPT 27. 10am. Orientation Session, conducted by Brigade co-ordinators, Coral Wynter, Jim McIlroy, and Tamara Pearson. Discussion of political themes of the brigade and guidelines for participation.

11am. Introductory talk on Venezuelan history and politics, by Dr Marcelo Alfonzo, professor at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). Held at the hostel where we stayed during the brigade period, the Ateneo Popular, Los Chaguaremos.

Marcelo gave a very interesting overview of the modern history of Venezuela, from the indigenous struggles against the conquistadors and the independence struggles against Spain led by Simon Bolivar in the early 19th century, to the neoliberal period

of the Fourth Republic, to the rise of Hugo Chavez and the development of the revolutionary process over the past decade. He concluded with comments on current politics and the presidential election campaign.

Afternoon. Talk and tour of the National Institute of Hygiene Plant, a world leader in the manufacture of vaccines, led by institute director Dr Maria Fernanda Correa. We saw the modern equipment installed at the plant, and were informed that it would export vaccines against common diseases to all parts of the Latin America and the Third World. The plant is part of Venezuela's effort to diversify and modernise its economy in the new era.

Followed by a tour of the UCV, led by education academic Dr Eithell Zamos, explaining the history of the old universities of Venezuela, and the problems of the traditional higher education system. We then proceeded to visit the new Bolivarian University (UBV) nearby, and were given talks by UBV academics and the director general of the university, Dr Jose Garcia Fernandez. They explained the role of the UBV in training a new professional cadre to carry forward the revolutionary development of Venezuela into the future.

FRI SEPT 28. 10am. Presentation on ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America), by Ruben Pereira, director of social movements for ALBA, at the ALBA Building, Sabana Grande. He explained to us: "In Venezuela, we are re-writing history. We are beginning the construction of a new economic and social platform for a future society.

"In addition, through ALBA, we are moving to incorporate the social movements into a multinational structure. The main reason for ALBA is to guarantee social security to the peoples of Latin America.

"The socialist orientation of ALBA was defined in 2010 at a conference in Ecuador. Together, we are fighting against political and military intervention by the USA in Latin America.

"Bolivar is alive today, and ALBA is part of his legacy. We welcome you to revolutionary Venezuela in the name of the dignity of the Latin American peoples."

Afternoon. Visit to the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), at Marichi, in the hills above Caracas. Lunch in the cafeteria, followed by a tour of the campus. Including meetings with students from many countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. They explained that coming to the totally free medical school in Venezuela had opened their eyes politically to the reality of the Bolivarian Revolution and to the need for change in their homelands.

ELAM director Sandra Moreno told us: "Visits such as yours are an honor for us. In Venezuela, we believe in the changing from the values of capitalism and imperialism to

socialism.

“The revolution promotes life, not death. From its founding in 2005, this school has been training doctors from overseas, supported by Mission Barrio Adentro. A large part of the training of these young people is based on working in the communities.

“Around 800 medical students graduated from ELAM in January this year. Some 42 countries are represented here.

“The challenge is for us to transform the conception of education. Our program doesn't see disciplines as separated, but as integrated. Doctors are an active agent for change in our country,” Moreno concluded.

SAT SEPT 29. 10am. Tour of the barrios above the eastern Caracas municipality of Petare, hosted by the Sala de la Batalla Sociales, La Comuna, a grouping of 35 Community Councils in the area.

Jose Gregorio Sanchez, from Community Radio Petare, told us that the barrio's first radio station had been operating for 10 years now. “It plays a key role in the community. The private media stress stories of drugs and death, but that is a distorted view.

“The radio station is a space to tell the community what's really happening. To talk about the positive events.

“The Chavez government is doing a lot for us, but this can only happen together with the people. More involvement of the community means more achievements for the revolution,” he said.

Community council members welcomed us to their neighbourhood. “Socialism is in the barrios. Please go out and counter the lies about the Venezuelan Revolution carried in the international media, so that our process can be well known in the world,” they said.

“In the coming election, we have two choices: the candidate of the nation, Chavez, who removed US control of the country, or the other candidate, Capriles, who sells out our homeland. Capriles, as governor of Miranda state where we live, has not made one Bolivar of investment in our community,” they said.

During the day, we also visited a community bank, which handles small-scale individual and business banking, and a neighbourhood Infocentre, dealing with youth and family issues.

Later, we toured the site of a local Aldea University, where we were told that “students now don't have to travel long distances to be in university. In the past, students could not go to university, partly because of geography. This will now change.”

The Aldea University was being built alongside a proposed chocolate factory, both to provide jobs and income, and to be sources of training and education. An urban

garden with vegetables, as well as cacao plants, is being developed nearby.

Next, the brigade visited an Integrated Diagnostic Centre (CDI), part of Mission Barrio Adentro 2, where medium level medical services were provided totally free to the community. A Cuban doctor, Dr Alejandro, explained that this barrio, high on the side of a mountain, “had never had a medical centre for advanced treatment before.

“It was a difficult area, and Venezuelan doctors never came here, before the revolution. Our work includes emergencies, clinical lab work, various therapies, and intensive rehabilitation,” he added.

Our day in the Petare barrio ended with a warm final farewell gathering, including presentations and greetings from community reps and brigadistas. We left the Sala de la Batalla Sociales with a strong sense of the revolutionary enthusiasm of the grassroots people for Chavez and the revolutionary process in Venezuela.

SUN SEPT 30. 10am. Trip up the Avila Mountain, towering above Caracas city, by the Teleferico (cable car). The morning began with a long wait in a queue for the Teleferico, as Sunday meant many families took the trip with us as well.

At the top, after noting the stunning views of Caracas on the way up, we walked along the escarpment, took lunch, and some of us made the short tour down to the picturesque village, Galipano, on the other side.

MON OCT 1. 10am. Meeting at the White House, the administrative building behind the Miraflores Presidential Palace, with architect Gilberto Rodriguez, and talk on Grand Mission Vivienda, the project to build two million new homes and apartments for needy Venezuelan families over five years.

Rodriguez, director of the Presidential Office of Planning and Projects, explained that the office operated by “looking for unused or underused lands, such as parking lots in the city, and designing and building housing for thousands of homeless people.

“The revolution decided to take advantage of the existence of underutilised lands to try to answer the urgent social need for housing. Often, the landowners are upset, but they are paid a fair amount based on the purchase price, rather than the overinflated market rate.

“Under the Bolivarian revolution, the state recognises a historic debt to the poor barrios. Now we are providing infrastructure. Those who can afford to pay, do so. Those who can’t, don’t have to,” Rodriguez said.

The talk was followed by a long walking tour of inner Caracas, showing examples of housing projects for the needy. We visited one large block of flats, still being completed, where residents told us how grateful they were to President Chavez and the revolution for providing their new accommodation.

Afternoon: 3pm. Forum with Maria Leon, veteran revolutionary, former Minister

for Women, and currently Deputy in the National Assembly. Leon welcomed us, and introduced herself as a “militant communist since the age of 20. In the 1960s, we were involved in the armed struggle in Venezuela.

“After the fall of Salvador Allende in Chile, we thought a peaceful revolution was impossible,” she said. “So, when Chavez came to power, everyone was surprised. And when Chavez said the revolution was socialist, we were amazed and delighted.

“Despite the many advances, the revolution has many problems, many errors. But I am confident that in Venezuela we will soon be seeing the first socialist revolution of the 21st century.”

Leon explained that the socialist program being presented by President Chavez in the October 7 presidential elections had five broad historical objectives, which together represent “gains not just for the workers of Venezuela, but for all workers of our America, and of the whole world”.

A broad-ranging discussion and question period followed Leon’s talk, involving the role of women, the environment, international relations and the nature of Socialism of the 21st Century.

TUES OCT 2. 11am. Media conference for international solidarity groups, in Plaza Venezuelano, Caracas city. The AVSN brigade attended, and gave our greetings in support of Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution, along with representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Spain, France and Britain, among others.

We were interviewed for radio and TV, both from Venezuela and overseas. It was encouraging to see and meet representatives from other countries expressing solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution. However, it was also disappointing that more and larger delegations were not present to observe such an important process for the world progressive movement.

1pm. Visit to Urban Organoponic Garden at Parque Central, near Bellas Artes Metro Station. Hosted by head gardener Angel Marquez. “We produce fresh, cheap vegetables for the community,” he told us. “The food is for everyone, not just for expensive restaurants.

“Before the revolution, there were many unused lands in the country. Now the revolution is taking over the land and producing more food, striving for agricultural security,” Angel said.

3pm. Meeting at the Latin American Parliament building, presented by Carolus Wimmer, longstanding deputy of the LAP and leading member of the Communist Party of Venezuela (CPV). Carolus recently made his second trip to Australia, sponsored on this occasion by the Communist Party of Australia, and previously by Socialist Alliance.

Carolus explained that the 2012 presidential elections were not just a contest between two candidates, “but between two projects, two systems, two futures for Venezuela. On the one hand, we have Capriles, as the candidate of the oligarchy and imperialism, and on the other, Hugo Chavez, the candidate of the people, of a positive future, of the struggle for socialism.”

Two other speakers addressed the meeting: Francisco Padilla, from the Civic Military Bolivarian Front, and Gabriel Aguirre, from the CPV Youth. Padilla spoke about the importance of unity between the military and social progressive movements in building the revolutionary process.

Aguirre stressed the active involvement of young people in the Bolivarian revolution and the pro-Chavez electoral campaign in particular. The challenge now is to deepen the currently high participation of youth in education, and to fight for the rights of young workers in society.

WED OCT 3. Bus trip to the regional city of Maracay, an industrial town around two hours west from Caracas. Hosted by Andres Eloy Rodriguez, we first visited a campus of the institute for the National Investigation of Agriculture ((INA), where we observed the development of organoponical production under greenhouse conditions.

After that, we travelled by minibus to the Henri Pellier National Park, where we were hosted by the Organisation of African Descendants in Venezuela. The explained the history of the descendants of African slaves rediscovering their heritage and establishing an association to express their identity.

This was followed by an exciting participation in a mass election rally for President Chavez in the city centre of Maracay, in which tens of thousands of red T-shirted Venezuelans roared their support. Our group became separated in the crowd, but fortunately, we were able to join up together at the end of the rally.

The day ended with an interesting meeting with leaders of the Afro-Descendants and others, who explained how the pro-Chavez Campaign Carabobo was organised in the state of Aragua. It was an impressive display of grassroots organising, on an extremely disciplined basis.

THURS OCT 4. Participation in the massive final election rally for Chavez in Caracas. Our day began by joining with members of social movements in a feeder march toward the centre of the city, which soon became a huge flood of people heading into town.

Our brigade eventually divided into small groups, and set off as best we could to join the estimated three million supporters of Chavez who occupied seven major streets, including the rally centre in Avenue Bolivar. Our various groups had different experiences, including some managing to get quite close to Chavez, but all had a

fantastic time on the day.

Even a huge rainstorm in the middle of the afternoon couldn't dampen people's spirits, and the whole day was the biggest highlight of our whole itinerary.

FRI OCT 5. Walk through the Bolivarian historic heart of Caracas city. Despite another heavy rain storm, we managed to visit the Casa Bolivar, where the Great Liberator of Venezuela and Latin America from Spanish rule in the early 19th century was born and raised, as well as the nearby Bolivar Museum, which records his life and achievements.

We also visited Plaza Bolivar, which commemorates the national hero, as well as Puente Llaguna, where police shootings of pro-Chavez demonstrators led up to the April 2002 coup against the president, which was overturned two days later by a mass popular uprising supported by progressive military forces.

SAT OCT 6. Trip on the new train line to the town of Cua, in the countryside outside Caracas. This modern train is part of the Chavez government's ongoing project to construct new public transport systems, and to decentralise communities and industry outside the capital.

After that, many of us took the cable car from Parque Central up into the barrio areas in the hills above. This new modern system dramatically assists barrio residents to move around. This again is an element of the government's plan to help the people of the barrios to improve their quality of life.

SUN OCT 7. Presidential election day. On the big day, brigade members visited a couple of polling booths in the Los Chaguaremos neighbourhood near our hostel. While this is a middle-class area, which no doubt gave majority support to the Capriles campaign, it was impressive to see the huge turn-out of voters in long lines waiting to vote.

After that, we took the Metro to Agua Salud station and went to the polling booth in the traditional revolutionary community of Barrio 23 January. There we waited for hours in the hot sun until President Chavez arrived to great applause to cast his own vote.

That night, a number of us travelled into the city to join the thousands of others gathered near Miraflores Palace to celebrate Chavez' victory. Even though the result was a bit closer than many had hoped, the people were ecstatic and overcome with joy at the decisive win.

MON OCT 8. Report back on the election result; feedback and discussion on the brigade; and discussion on building solidarity with Venezuela back home.

Tamara gave a comprehensive report on the election result, emphasising the massive voter turn-out of 80 per cent, the highest in Venezuelan history. She analysed the

figures, and stressed that although the opposition had gained some 44%, with over 6 million votes, Chavez had won more than 55% and over 8 million votes for the first time.

By international standards, the result was huge, and Chavez will undoubtedly pursue his mandate for socialism with renewed vigor. On the other hand, the right-wing opposition will be more aggressive, and will try out different tactics in an attempt to destabilise the government in future.

The challenge is now before the government, the PSUV and the revolutionary people to tackle the problems ahead, and accelerate the struggle for Socialism of the 21st Century, Tamara said.

The brigade proceeded to adopt a media statement congratulating Chavez on his victory, and calling for increased international solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution.

Members also pledged to step up efforts to build solidarity when they returned to their home countries, including AVSN in Australia, and solidarity organisations in other countries represented on the brigade. Everyone was agreed the solidarity brigade had been an inspiring and deeply educational experience, and vowed to spread the word about Venezuela wherever they could in future.

Latin American Adventure, Part 2 by Jim McIlroy, October 29, 2012. *Report on trip from Caracas, Venezuela, to Puerto Iguazu, Argentina. Sat Oct 13 to Sun Oct 28, 2012*

After our wonderful experience in September-October with the AVSN Venezuelan Presidential Elections Solidarity Brigade (Sept 27 to Oct 8, 2012), the four of us began an amazing and exhausting voyage of discovery through four Latin American countries over two weeks. It was a punishing, but rewarding, experience.

We flew out of Caracas to Lima, Peru, on Sat morning Oct 13. We stayed at the Hostal Espana, a strange but comfortable place with paintings and statues all over. Over the next two days, we visited various historic buildings and sites, including the San Francisco Monastery, the Museum of the Inquisition, the Plaza de Armas, as well as a bus tour of city sights.

The political and social contrast with Venezuela was soon apparent. Extremes of poverty and wealth in Peru are combined with a lack of obvious public political activity, certainly nothing on the scale and vitality of Bolivarian Venezuela. Nevertheless, the struggle continues, with teachers and medical workers on strike for improved pay and conditions, etc.

On Mon morning Oct 15, we boarded a bus for the first of many gruelling long-distance trips, a 20-hour ride from Lima to Arequipa, southern Peru. The countryside

along the southern coast of Peru is an incredibly dry, sandy desert, until we began an ascent into the inland Andes mountains that night.

At 2500m above sea level, Arequipa is a historic Spanish colonial city, with white stone churches and public buildings, and classic plazas. We did observe nearby a march by public servants in support of higher wages.

On the afternoon of Tues Oct 16, we took a bus further south into the Andes to Puno, through magnificent mountain scenery, arriving that night after an eight-hour trip. Puno lies at 3800m above sea level, on the banks of the world's largest high-altitude lake, Titicaca.

Puno is where we all began to feel the effects of altitude sickness to varying degrees. On Wed Oct 17, we boarded a motor boat for an all-day trip on the lake. We visited a floating village, where the Indigenous people construct their homes on a unique human-made island, made of reeds.

We then travelled two hours to an island in the lake, where we climbed, huffing and puffing, a hill, and took a long walk around the coastline. Lake Titicaca is indeed one of the natural wonders of the world.

On the morning of Mon Oct 18, we boarded a bus for an eight-hour trip to La Paz, Bolivia. This included a ride on a ferry boat across a narrow section of the lake, near Copacabana, Bolivia, before travelling between rugged hills until we reached the famous High Plains (Altiplano) region of the country.

Finally, we descended rapidly into the steep valley within which La Paz sits, at a height of 3600m. We stayed at the pleasant Hostal Maya near the centre of the city, noting the political signs and graffiti supporting President Evo Morales and Che Guevara.

Unfortunately, because of our tight schedule on this particular stage of the trip, we were unable to follow up political contacts, but hope to return to Bolivia later to rectify this situation. Almost one whole day of our La Paz stay was taken up with applying for visas to Paraguay, which further limited our available time.

La Paz was a special challenge because of the severe effects of altitude sickness. Nevertheless, it was a fascinating experience, which gave us the beginnings of an insight into the Indigenous-based popular movement which is challenging the rule of the traditional oligarchy in Bolivia, under the leadership of Evo Morales and the MAS.

On the evening of Sat Oct 20, we took another bus from La Paz to the World-Heritage listed city of Sucre, down the mountains to the east, at a height of 2800m. Sucre is reputedly Bolivia's most attractive city, with white stone buildings and grand plazas throughout.

Sucre was where the independence of Bolivia was declared in August 1825. We had

an enjoyable stay there, and began to see the different sectors and regions of Bolivian society more clearly.

Avoiding the long trip to Paraguay via Santa Cruz recommended by the guidebooks, on Monday Oct 22, we undertook a tough bus trip over unmade roads from Sucre to the far eastern border town of Villamontes, taking nearly 15 hours. Although challenging, the trip cut our total travel time to Asuncion, Paraguay, by about the same number of hours.

Although Villamontes is a small, outback town, we had one of our best breakfasts there, as well as a delicious fish lunch (almuerza). Villamontes is the place where the infamous Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay eventually ended in the 1930s, with Bolivia losing more territory to Paraguay.

On the early morning of Wed Oct 23, at the ungodly hour of 3am, we boarded a bus to Asuncion. The trip took about 16 hours in all, with numerous stops for border and police checks. The Gran Chaco is extremely flat and desolate, with not much vegetation except Australian gum trees everywhere (as they are throughout Latin America!)

Arriving in the Paraguayan capital that night, we spent Thurs Oct 25 in Asuncion, at a charming hostel in the historic centre of the city. Paraguay is again a contrast of extreme wealth and Western-style business and deep poverty.

However, we met a group of students protesting high fees and business domination of the education system. And while we were there, ex-president Lugo, deposed by a parliamentary coup in June this year, made a strong speech to a rally in regional Paraguay condemning the golpistas and vowing to return in elections due in April 2013.

On the bus trip from Asuncion to the border town of Ciudad del Este on Fri Oct 26, we observed the clear signs of multinational corporate agricultural development of cash crops for export in the countryside. From Ciudad del Este we immediately took another bus across the border, via Brazil, to the Argentine town of Puerto Iguazu.

On Sat Oct 27, we visited the magnificent Iguazu Falls, the world's largest series of waterfalls, on the tripartite border between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. It was an unforgettable experience to tour this wonder of nature, including the incomparable Devil's Throat, where the power of the water over the widest section of the falls is breathtaking.

Finally, on Sun Oct 28, after an interesting visit to a Bird and Animal Refuge, displaying many of Latin America's unique species, Stage 2 of our voyage of discovery of the continent ended. That afternoon, Marg G left on a luxury bus for a 20-hour trip to Buenos Aires.

The remaining three months of our five-month stay in South America will be a little more leisurely. This amazing part of the world, in both the geographical and political senses, is a constant source of surprise and inspiration.

More on all this later.

Hasta luego,

Jim Mc, Coral W, and Geoff C.

Latin American Adventure, Part 3 by Jim McIlroy. *The journey from Iguazu, northern Argentina, to Arica, northern Chile, the long way round: Oct 29 to Nov 22, 2012*

After seeing Marg Gleeson off on a long-distance bus to Buenos Aires, a journey of 20 hours, from the town of Puerto Iguazu, at the north-eastern tip of Argentina, we spent Mon Oct 29 resting at our comfortable hostel near the centre. We (Jim, Coral and Geoff) had to apply for visas to Brazil in order to visit the magnificent Iguazu Falls from the Brazilian side the following day. We had already seen the falls — the world's largest series of waterfalls — from the Argentine side with Marg a couple of days earlier.

On Tues Oct 30, we obtained our Brazilian visas, and then did a long walk through Puerto Iguazu town to the junction of the Iguazu and Parana rivers, a tri-partite border between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. These magnificent rivers were the centre of catastrophic territorial wars between the three countries during the 19th century, during which Paraguay lost land and a huge proportion of its population. Today, fresh water and hydroelectric dams are a source of widespread controversy, for environmental and economic reasons, as multinational corporations seek access to cheap power and water. These rivers are a precious resource for the peoples of South America, and must be protected at all costs.

On Wed October 31, we took a tour by mini-bus across the bridge to the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguacu, and on to the Brazilian side of the falls. The view from there is perhaps less dramatic than from Argentina, but more of a panorama of this Wonder of Nature. From there we went on to cross the border again into the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este, the cheap shopping and smuggling capital of Latin America, we were told. Coral and Geoff both bought new suitcases, as theirs were coming apart from drastic wear and tear by this stage.

We then did a bus tour of the massive Itapau Dam, primarily within Paraguay, the second largest dam in the world after the Seven Gorges in China. It is a major source of public revenue for Paraguay, and was one of the issues in the coup against former President Fernando Lugo in June this year, as he was seeking to renegotiate a deal with a US multinational to force them to pay more than a pittance for hydroelectricity. We

then returned to Puerto Iguazu for our final night in Argentina, for the time being.

On Thurs November 1, we set out by bus via Brazil to Paraguay again, arriving at the Ciudad del Este bus terminal mid morning. As luck would have it, a bus to the central Paraguayan town of Coronel Oviedo was leaving within 15 minutes and we rushed onto it. From Coronel Oviedo, we caught another bus to the town of Villarica, in search of the village of Nueva Australia (New Australia), established as a utopian socialist commune by Australian labour movement leader William Lane and his followers in 1892, after the defeat of the 1891 Queensland shearers' strike. Villarica is a pleasant town, east of the capital Asuncion, but we were unable to find Nueva Australia anywhere nearby.

The following day, Fri Nov 2, acting on further advice, we took a bus to the small village of Independencia, looking for signs of New Australia. Despite friendly assistance from a worker at the local council, this proved fruitless as well. Independencia turned out to include a strong German-heritage community, with not an Aussie in sight. We were later told some of the Germanic residents had been supporters of Hitler and still had Swastika flags on display in their homes.

On Sat Nov 3, we took the bus to Coronel Oviedo again, moved into a nice hostel for a couple of days, and set off in a taxi to the village of Nueva Londres (New London), about 30 kms away. It turns out that the municipality of Nueva Australia had changed its name to Nueva Londres in the 1950s. We met up with some friendly locals who informed us that the tiny village of Nueva Australia still existed, just off the main highway to Asuncion, just one kilometre past the turn-off to New London. We took another taxi there, and were lucky enough to be able to interview a local teacher who explained the story of Nueva Australia to us. (Coral has detailed all this in a separate report).

Sun Nov 4 was a rest and writing day at our comfortable hostel in Coronel Oviedo. Thank goodness, as we were getting fairly tired of constant bus travel by now. On Mon Nov 5, we boarded another bus to the capital city of Paraguay, Asuncion, and revisited the Spanish-colonial style hostel Residencia de Silva, not far from the centre. From our hostel, we walked around the city, to the main plaza, a couple of museums and the pantheon containing the graves of famous leaders of the independence movement against Spain in the early 19th century and later wars.

The following day, Tues Nov 6, (Melbourne Cup Day back home), we did further exploration of the old city of Asuncion, which retains much of the colonial buildings, but is quite run down. We visited the old Railway Station, which is unfortunately now closed, along with South America's first railway line dating back to the mid 19th century. The contrast between rich and poor in Paraguay is quite marked, reflecting

decades of dictatorship followed by right-wing Colorado Party rule.

On Wed Nov 7, we took another bus south to Paraguay's second city, the attractive town on the Parana River, Encarnacion. There, we checked into the comfortable Hostel Germano, near the bus terminal.

The next day, Thurs Nov 8, we made a trip to the village of Trinidad, east of Encarnacion, to tour the ruins of the Jesuit settlement, established in the 16th century but allowed to decline after the Spanish crown expelled the Jesuits from all of Latin America in 1767. The history of the Jesuits in Latin America is controversial. On the one hand, they invaded Indigenous lands and forced the people to accept Christianity and hard labour. On the other, they organised and trained the people to resist attacks by slave-traders from Brazil and Argentina. Eventually, the Spanish king decided they were becoming too powerful, creating a virtual state within a state, and the Jesuits were thrown out of the continent. The various missions in Paraguay and northern Argentina were allowed to decay into ruins over the following century.

On Fri Nov 9, we took a bus over the bridge across the Parana River to Posadas, Argentina, where we booked into the Residencial Misiones. In the afternoon, we explored the attractive city with its plazas and restored colonial buildings.

The next day, Sat Nov 10, we took a short bus ride to the most famous set of Jesuit ruins, at San Ignacio de Mini. On return to Posadas, we boarded another bus down the river westward to the regional centre of Corrientes, where we stayed over night.

On Sun Nov 11, at the early hour of 6am, we boarded a bus for the three-hour trip to the country town of Mercedes, and from there by truck over rough roads to the isolated village of Colonia de Pelligrini, on the edge of the world's second largest wetlands after Brazil's Pantanal, Esteros del Ibera. From our hostel, we walked across a long causeway to the entrance to the wetlands.

The next morning, Mon Nov 12, we took a wonderful boat ride with a local guide over the lake, observing caiman alligators, capybaras (big guinea pigs), and a variety of waterbird life. In the afternoon, we took a nature walk through the reserve, seeing a marsh deer, an armadillo and the tracks of a huge snake.

At the ungodly hour of 4am on Tues Nov 13, we found ourselves returning by local bus over corrugated roads in pitch darkness to Mercedes, where we returned by another bus to Corrientes. We then crossed the Parana River to the twin city of Resistencia, where we checked out the historic centre, art museum and plaza, before setting off on a 10-hour bus trek overnight to the north-western city of Salta. Salta is the centre of this region, and boasts an amazing central plaza, with an archeological museum featuring three mummies, well-preserved by the Andean climate on the slopes of the 6700m high volcano, Mt Llullailaico. The museum presented a revealing

history of pre-Incan society in the area.

On Wed Nov 14, we walked around the city, further exploring the historic centre. We also checked out the terminal of the Tren a las Nubes (Train to the Clouds), which climbs to a height of over 4200m, but is too expensive for our budget, unfortunately. Also, we didn't have the time at this stage.

Instead, at 8am the next morning, Thurs Nov 15, we continued our voyage on a 20-hour international bus across the Bolivian border to Santa Cruz. Most of the trip was through flat land, part of the Chaco region which covers western Paraguay, which sits beside the foothills of the Andes. After a long wait at Argentinian customs, our bus eventually continued on to Bolivia's largest city, Santa Cruz, arriving at 3.30am on Fri Nov 16. After resting in the Hotel Suecia for the day, we were lucky to find a seat on a bus to Cochabamba, via the Old Road. The New Road had been blockaded by villagers protesting issues relating to the upcoming National Census, so no buses were going that way.

The bus to Cochabamba left at 7pm, and climbed over winding, unmade roads for 15 hours, arriving at 10am on Sat Nov 17. We immediately jumped onto another bus for La Paz half an hour later, a trip of more than 8 hours, from a height of 2500m to 4000m. The scenery of Andean mountains and valleys was absolutely stunning.

Arriving in La Paz that same day at 7pm, we took a taxi to our previous hostel, Residencia Maya, near the heart of the city, perched in a street on the steep hillsides which surround La Paz's central avenue. We immediately began to feel the effects of the high altitude, breathlessness and difficulty in sleeping.

On Sun Nov 18, we rested during the day, and then met up with editor and journalist Hugo Moldez, who gave a fascinating interview for *Links/Green Left Weekly* about the background, achievements and challenges facing the Indigenous people's revolution under way in Bolivia, under the leadership of President Evo Morales and the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism).

On the morning of Mon Nov 19, we took a taxi to the outer suburbs of La Paz to the Cuban Embassy, to obtain information about visas for Geoff's planned trip there in late December to join the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS)'s Southern Cross Brigade. Most of the rest of the day was taken up with trying to rest, due to the effects of severe insomnia because of the high altitude.

Finally, at 6am on Tues Nov 20, we were lucky to be able to get on one of the last buses to leave La Paz before the 7am bus curfew imposed by the city's mayor because of the census the following day. Everyone in Bolivia had to be at home on Wed Nov 21 for Census Day, vital for planning the country's future.

We left La Paz on an international bus for the 8-hour trip to the far-northern

Chilean city of Arica. The scenery as we descended from snow covered Andean mountains into the dry, sandy hills of the coastal strip was amazing. Arriving in the seaside city of Arica, and settling into our hostel, the comfortable Jardin del Sol (Garden of the Sun), we ended another section of our Latin American Adventure, and prepared for the next stage, covering Chile and again Argentina. On the way, we are finding out much more about this incredible continent, its people, its politics and its culture. Latin America right now is so important for the future of humanity and the planet. We will report further on our voyage of discovery at a later date.

Latin American Adventure, Part 4 by Jim McIlroy; December 9, 2012. *From Arica, northern Chile, to Neuquen, Argentina, November 20 to December 7, 2012*

TUES NOV 20: Travel by bus from La Paz, Bolivia, through beautiful Andes mountains, to the seaside city of Arica, far northern Chile, near the border with Peru. Stay at the pleasant and comfortable Hostal Jardin del Sol.

WED NOV 21: Day in Arica, visit to museum of archaeology, to see the mumias, the Chinchorros of city, walk along the seashore, swim at the Playa El Laucho (very cold water from the South Pacific Ocean), almuerza (lunch) at a restaurant on the beach.

THURS NOV 22: Trip by taxi to see the ancient geoglyphs on the sand mountains surrounding Arica, then the museum of archaeology San Miguel de Azapa, including some of the world's oldest mummies. That night attended a fabulous Tango concert in a local theatre.

FRI NOV 23: Rest day in Arica hostel, reading and writing.

SAT NOV 24: Bus to Iquique, another seaside town several hundred kilometres further south. Travelling through desolate sand hills, similar to the whole of northern Chile and southern Peru. Stay at more fancy hotel, walk along the shore and dinner at the Hula Hula Café, fish soup and pasta.

SUN NOV 25: Watched parade of local community groups, walked through avenues of unique wooden houses, including tramway. Returned to seashore and saw sea lions. Taxi to terminal. Afternoon bus to La Serena, 18 hours away, overnight via the city port of Antofagusta. Scenery change to green hills and valleys as we travel further south. Stay in Hostel Observatorio.

MON NOV 26: Walk through historic town of La Serena, attractive Plaza de Armas, and visit Museum of the 1950s Chilean dictator Gabriel Garcia Videla. That evening, took a minibus tour to the Observatorio Communal de Mamalluca, 50 kms away in the mountains. Fantastic views of moon and stars, with English-speaking

guide.

TUES NOV 27: Bus from La Serena to the capital Santiago, around 7 hours through fertile fields and hills. Arrive evening at 7pm. Taxi to Arcos Hotel, near Plaza Brazil. Dinner at hotel with Penny G, our friend from Brisbane, now living and working in theatre inside the prison system in Chile.

WED NOV 28: Day at Penny's house in suburb of San Miguel. Lunch and view of organic garden under development, as part of prisoner rehabilitation program, in her backyard.

THURS NOV 29: Walk around Santiago city centre, to Moneda Palace, history Museum of Santiago, Plaza de la Constitucion, Plaza de Armas and viewed many Spanish-colonial era buildings. Dinner at our favourite Café Peperone, near Plaza Brazil, with its 20 different types of empanadas and cute decor.

FRI NOV 30: Visit to Museum of Memory, a moving and thorough history of the coup against President Salvador Allende and the popular struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship, including accounts of repression and torture, as well as community resistance.

SAT DEC 1: Visit to the Contemporary Art Gallery, next to Moneda Palace, view modern masters from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Take Metro to Cerro Santa Lucia, a hill in the city, with good views of Santiago. Dinner with Penny in the main Mercado (market).

SUN DEC 2: Day trip by bus with Penny to seaside city of Valparaiso. Bus up the hill to Pablo Neruda's fabulous and eccentric house, La Sebastiana. Trip up the cliffside by the historic ascensor (elevator) La Concepcion, built in 1873. Pleasant coffee and cake at hillside café, and walk through colourful neighbourhood. Return to terminal for bus ride back to Santiago.

MON DEC 3: Morning bus from Santiago, over the picturesque, snow-topped Andes mountains, to Mendoza, Argentina, about 6 hours. Saw highest mountain in southern hemisphere, Mt Aconcagua, in distance. Then through flat plains to Mendoza, surrounded by vineyards. Stay in Hostel Independencia, near city centre.

TUES DEC 4: Day in historic Mendoza. Tour by minibus to wineries and an olive oil plant. Wine tasting at one large and one smaller winery. Evening tango class at hall near our hostel.

WED DEC 5: Visit to history museum, displays of archaeology and impact of 1861 earthquake on Mendoza city. Evening bus 12 hours overnight to southern city of Neuquen, gateway to Patagonia.

THURS DEC 6: Arrive at Hostel Portal de Suenos. Tour with guide to Dinosaur Museum El Chocon, home of the largest skeleton of a carnivorous dinosaur in the

world.

FRI DEC 7: Bus to Bariloche, centre of the Argentine Lakes District, in preparation for trip south to the famous icy region of Patagonia.

Thus ends Stage 4 of our Latin American Adventure, with more challenges and interest ahead. Further reports to come.

Best regards,

Jim, Coral and Geoff.

December 8, 2012.

Latin American Adventure, Part 5 by Jim McIlroy, December 24.

From the Andes mountain town of Bariloche, Patagonia, Argentina to Buenos Aires, Dec 8, 2012 to Dec 23, 2012.

SAT DEC 8: The view from our hostel bedroom window was stunning. Lake and snow-topped mountains in all directions. We spent the day walking around Bariloche, a town of about 100,000 people in the heart of the Argentine Lake District.

SUN DEC 9: We took a local bus to the Cerro Campanario Look-out, overlooking the fabulous Lake Nahuel Huapi, about 20km out of town. A chair-lift carried us to the hill-top, where we saw what is justifiably described as “One of the 10 best views in the world” of the surrounding Andes mountains and lakes. After that, we went to Puerto Panuelo on the lake, where we boarded a ferry to Isla Victoria and the Arrayane Forest (made up of a species of tree unique to this area). Upon returning by bus to Bariloche, we saw a rally for Democracy and Justice, which primarily seemed to be supporting President Cristina Kirchner. The several hundred participants were part of a national series of rallies on that day, which marked the anniversary of the end of Argentina’s brutal military dictatorship in 1984.

MON DEC 10: We caught another local bus to the Cerro Leones Caves, out of town in the other direction, east. A young guide took us on a tour of the ancient caves, including a subterranean lake and rock paintings by the original Indigenous people of the region. Returned to Bariloche and our hostel for the night.

TUES DEC 11: An early start to catch the 6am Chalten Travel Bus along the famous Ruta 40 Highway to the south. We travelled on mostly gravel roads through lakes and mountains, and then cold-country tundra plains, known as the Patagonia Steppes, to the small town of Perito Moreno, where we stayed overnight in a country pub, the Hotel Belgrano.

WED DEC 12: In the morning, Geoff and Coral did a tour of the Caves of Los Manos, (the hands) fascinating, with 9000-year-old paintings of the left hands of the Tuhuelche people as well as many guanacos, the llama like animals around Patagonia.

Boarded another Chalten Travel bus for the long trip, again over mostly unmade roads, through flat, dry tundra plains, to the tiny alpine resort of El Chalten, perched at the foot of gigantic mountains, near Lake Viedma. This time we stayed in a real backpackers' hostel, and met some charming travellers from France and Germany.

THURS DEC 13: Took a tour bus to Bahia Tunel, on Lake Viedma, where we boarded a boat to the towering Viedma Glacier. A totally new experience for us to be beneath a huge glacier wall, with floating icebergs all around. At 6pm, we boarded another bus for the four-hour trip to the main tourist town in Patagonia, El Calafate. Stayed in a family hostel that night.

FRI DEC 14: Spent the day exploring the town of El Calafate. Moved into a roomier backpacker hostel, and relaxed.

SAT DEC 15: Bus tour to the highlight of our Patagonia trip: Perito Moreno Glacier, on Lake Argentino. Perito Moreno Glacier is stunning: a massive sheet of ice, with pieces regularly falling off into the lake to create small icebergs. It is one of the few glaciers in the world which is still expanding — most are now receding, with the impact of climate change. After a boat trip near the glacier wall, we proceeded closer, descending walkways to observe the glacier front, seeing pieces of ice break off with a loud crack. An amazing experience. We returned by bus to El Calafate and our hostel.

SUN DEC 16: Explored the town during the morning, then took a mid-day bus trip of around five hours to the southern Atlantic seaport town of Rio Gallegos. After a wait of an hour, we boarded an onwards bus for the overnight journey up the east coast to Puerto Madryn. Met 2 other Aussie retirees, schooteachers.

MON DEC 17: Arrived in Puerto Madryn, a seaside town founded by Welsh settlers in the 19th century. In the afternoon, we walked to the beach front and explored the city centre. At 6pm, we took yet another overnight bus further north to Mar del Plata.

TUES DEC 18: Reached Mar del Plata, population one million, the main seaside city for holidaying residents of Buenos Aires. We took a taxi from the bus terminal to our Hostel Urbano, right in the mall in the centre of the city. In the afternoon, we walked around the city, from the main plaza to the beachfront. Many pleasant historic buildings and parks.

WED DEC 19: We took a long walk through leafy streets to the Natural Science Museum, which displayed an interesting collection of South American animals, birds and insects, including the sex life of sea-horses. From there, we braved the cold Atlantic Ocean for a swim. Rain set in during the afternoon, so we rested in our hostel before venturing out that evening to the Charles Dickens Hotel. Remarkable.

THURS DEC 20: Boarded a morning bus to Buenos Aires, a trip of about five

hours. We then took a taxi to the Hostel Obelisco, in Corrientes Avenue, near the city centre. Walked around the city, and arranged Geoff's ticket from Cuba to Quito, Ecuador, after the Australia-Cuba Solidarity Brigade finishes, in late January 2013.

FRI DEC 21: Visited the Cuban Embassy in the suburb of Belgrano to obtain Geoff's visa to Cuba. Then explored the city, spending the evening at an open-air Tango Bar near our hostel.

SAT DEC 22: Walked to the city centre, and joined a tour of the Presidential Palace, La Casa Rosada, seeing portraits of heroes of Latin American revolutions and independence struggles. Visited the Rio Plata waterfront, and enjoyed a Tango Dinner and Concert that night. Very flash. Determined to have tango lessons when we get home, have to convince Jim.

SUN DEC 23: Went to the historic neighbourhood of La Boca for lunch. Finally, caught the bus out to the International Airport to send Geoff off to Cuba for his next adventure. Coral and Jim are staying in Buenos Aires for a few more days over Xmas, then setting off for Uruguay in late December.

Thus ends the latest stage of our Latin American Adventure. We calculate that we have so far taken 55 bus trips over the past six weeks or so, from about one hour to 22 hours long. It has been exhausting, but very rewarding and educational.

Coral and I now look forward to the final stage of our journey, taking in Uruguay, Brazil and more of Argentina, before we return to Australia at the end of January 2013. Best wishes to all for a Happy Xmas and New Year, and we'll send another report as we go.

Latin American Adventure, Part 6 & Final Chapter by Jim McIlroy, January 15, 2013. *From Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Montevideo, Uruguay, and back again, and then home to Sydney, Australia, December 24, 2012, to January 14, 2013.*

MON DEC 24: Hot as Hades in Buenos Aires! Rest day for us, then we discovered that Geoff C's Cubana Airlines plane to Havana to join the Australia-Cuba Solidarity Brigade was delayed, and he was staying in a luxury hotel near our hostel. That night, we spent Xmas Eve with the young backpackers, eating pizza and drinking Cuba Libres till late.

TUES DEC 25: Xmas Day, still hot. Walked through city streets with Geoff while he waited for his rescheduled plane to Cuba. Visited historic buildings, such as the Teatro Colon. BA has been dubbed the Paris of Latin America, but seems more like Madrid to us.

WED DEC 26: Took a trip on the open-top Tourist Bus all around Buenos Aires,

very crowded. Trip took a total of nearly 4 hours, visiting all the main areas, such as La Boca, the La Plata river front, and Belgrano. Fascinating view of this major city, with all its contradictions of wealth and poverty.

THURS DEC 27: Finally left BA after about a week, to travel by the Buquebus ferry across the Rio Plata to the beautiful, ancient Portuguese-Spanish town of Colonia de Sacramento, Uruguay. The car ferry took around 3 hours, and we then proceeded to the friendly Hostel Espana, and walked around the waterfront in the evening.

FRI DEC 28: Spent a good part of the day wandering around the Old City, founded as a fortress town by the Portuguese in the 16th century, and fought over by the Spanish and Portuguese for 300 years. Uruguay itself was only established during the 19th century as a settlement of the ongoing struggle between Argentina and Brazil for control of its territory.

SAT DEC 29: Visited 7 small museums, showing the history of Colonia, the various Portuguese and Spanish buildings and furnishings, including one museum depicting the Indigenous heritage of the area. Colonia is so peaceful and quiet compared to the mayhem which is Buenos Aires. Saw the old Walled Fortress, the Gateway to the city, and various plazas.

SUN DEC 30: Local bus to the San Carlos de Real Playa (beach), swam in the Rio Plata, still mainly fresh water in this sector. Visited an amazing, eccentric museum of maritime history, mainly piracy, and the story of the German battleship *Graf Spee*, sunk off the Uruguayan coast after a battle with British warships in late 1939, in the early stages of World War II.

MON DEC 31: Walk around other parts of the Old City, then spent New Year's Eve at our hostel. Quiet toast together at midnight.

TUES JAN 1: Rest day, and more exploring of the historic city. Colonia is an oasis of tranquillity, chance to recharge our batteries for the last stage of our journey in Latin America.

WED JAN 2: 9am, 3 hour bus ride to the Uruguayan capital, Montevideo, a city of around 1 million people. Found a pleasant small hotel, the Hotel Royal, near the city centre. Walk to Plaza Independencia and the downtown area.

THURS JAN 3: Explored the city, including the waterfront and seaside area. Visited artisanal markets and other city sites.

FRI JAN 4: 9am, travelled by local bus to progressive leftists Washington and Viviane's holiday cottage at La Tuna, a seaside village about an hour along the east coast from Montevideo. Interview with V and W for *GLW/Links* about their political experiences, (Washington was jailed for 14 years under the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s), and current Uruguayan politics. Return by bus to Montevideo in

the evening

SAT JAN 5: Bus to Old City. Visit to Gaucho Museum, and Cultural History Museum. Long walk through various plazas and cobbled streets, back to our hostel in the city centre.

SUN JAN 6: Trip to Las Pocitos beach, for a swim in the Atlantic Ocean, and walk along the beach. Bus through leafy suburbs back to hostel. Listened to Festival of the Ninos drum march in the evening. Met the visiting Venezuelan ambassador to Cyprus and his family by chance in the street, who recognised us from seeing our film *Chasing Chavez* on Telesur!

MON JAN 7: Morning resting in the hotel, lunch at the Spanish Club. Evening, picked up by Viviane to meet old Communist Party militant Julio for an extensive interview at her flat.

TUES JAN 8: Lunch at the Tango Youth club, then visit to the Art Museum. Viewed exhibitions on Mayan history and culture, as well as the history of language.

WED JAN 9: Morning in the city. Left the charming city of Montevideo by bus for the regional town of Paysandu, on the Argentinian border. Viewed the Uruguayan countryside, which is mostly flat, fertile fields, with monoculture crops for export, with many cattle farms. Uruguay has few natural resources, mainly agriculture, to support its economy. Tried to travel on to town of Colon across the border in Argentina, but stopped at Argentine immigration because of new entry visa charge imposed only two days before. Return to Paysandu, stay in comfortable, reasonable hotel, and paid for Argentine visa on-line.

THURS JAN 10: Bus across border, successful this time, to Colon. Long wait at bus terminal in nearby park. Finally, 2pm bus to Rosario, 5 hours. Hotel near Rosario bus terminal.

FRI JAN 11: Morning spent touring historic Rosario city, birthplace of Che Guevara. Local bus to Che's family house, now occupied by an insurance company! Walk to Rio Parana riverfront, then taxi to Che Park, containing modest bronze statue of Che, the enduring symbol of the Cuban and Latin American revolutions. Disappointing lack of an adequate memorial to Argentina's most world-famous figure. 1pm bus to Buenos Aires again. Taxi to our old hostel, the Obelisco.

SAT JAN 12: Subte (Underground) train to Plaza de Mayo. Long walk to historic San Telmo district, visited Dorrego Park. Return to hostel to pack and prepare to leave for home.

SUN JAN 13: Early morning (4.30am) taxi to shuttle bus terminal for trip to Ezeiza International Airport. Aerolineas Argentinas flight to Sydney, leaving 9am. Smooth but tiring flight lasting nearly 15 hours.

MON JAN 14: Arrival in Sydney at around 2pm local time, but middle of night Argentinian time. Exhausted, but happy to be finally home.

So ended our long journey through eight Latin American countries over 4½ months. We took approximately 60 substantial bus trips of one to 22 hours duration in that time. It was an amazing experience, both educational and entertaining. Hopefully, we understand more about Latin American history, politics, culture and geography than we ever did before, and can pass on our experiences to people in Australia in future.

Hasta la victoria siempre! Venceremos! ■

10. Life Back in Australia

On February 10, 2013, we held a Latin American Adventure Party at the Shepherd Street, Chippendale, house, to report back on our wonderful trip to Latin American, and to celebrate my 67th birthday.

After that, I soon settled back into my main job organising GLW distribution.

Green Left Organising 2013. *SA Conference sets goals for GLW distribution campaign, February 5* by Jim McIlroy, national GLW distribution convenor

In the face of the challenge to increase the sales and subscriptions base of Australia's unique socialist weekly newspaper, *Green Left Weekly*, the Socialist Alliance 9th National Conference in Geelong in January this year adopted three resolutions:

1. SA branches discuss a focus on increasing the *GLW* Solidarity Subscription base.
2. Branches are strongly encouraged to establish *GLW* distribution committees/convenors.
3. For a national distribution push in the first part of the year. Branches to decided on targets for sales, sellers and hours. Discuss collaboration with Resistance in co-organising this push.

These are all moderate and achievable proposals, if we organised ourselves effectively, focusing initially on raising participation and hours spent selling in 2013.

Green Left Weekly is a publication based solely on people power. We need all the help we can get in selling, writing for and funding the paper.

Everyone can be involved in supporting *GLW* in one or more of these aspects. If you would like to help with distribution, such as taking a small bundle of papers to distribute, or selling subscriptions, contact your local branch of SA, email jimmcil@gmail.com, or phone 1800 634 206.

Campus O-Weeks, chance to get *Green Left* to new young people, February 12 by Jim McIlroy, National *GLW* distribution convenor

It is mid-February, and the university campus year is starting again. Now is the chance for Socialist Alliance and Resistance to reach out to win new members, and to get *Green Left* out to a whole new audience.

Students who join up to Resistance receive a four-week subscription to *GLW*, and the choice of a free membership of SA for the coming year. Resistance/SA stalls at Orientation Weeks are an ideal way to win new young people to the socialist movement. And our subscription base receives a temporary boost from the hundreds of new Res members joined up on campuses around the country.

It is vital that we ensure new joiners, especially those who choose to accept SA membership along with Resistance, are followed up to renew their subs as these subscriptions expire. This fits in well with our push for increased ongoing SA membership subs to *GLW*, in particular Solidarity Subscriptions.

The new issue of *Green Left*, No 953, with its cover featuring the campaign to stop Coal Seam Gas, gives us a big chance to boost our national sales this week. The key to success is Organisation! and increased involvement of our new and older members in distributing the paper in one way or another.

Legacy of Chavez

On March 6, Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, a comrade and Venezuela solidarity activist, wrote asking for some comments on the significance of Hugo Chavez for the Venezuelan paper *Correo del Orinoco*:

Hi Jim and Coral,

How's it going? I'm looking at writing an article for *Correo del Orinoco* about how Chavez has inspired revolutionaries across the world, and was hoping you (and heck, anyone else at hand), could please comment on why Chavez has been so important to the international left, how he inspired international revolution and the AVSN, and what he meant to you personally. Also, something on the significance of his death, and the kind of legacy he has left behind. Of course, the more input the better, so if you have any other comments you'd like to make, please include!

Thanks,

Ryan

I got back to him with the following:

Hi Ryan, here's a few thoughts from me:

Today, Wed March 6, local time, a rally of almost 100 people was called in Sydney, Australia, at short notice, to commemorate the life of President Hugo Chavez. Many speakers addressed the crowd and hailed the significance of Chavez and his leadership of the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela, and his role in uniting Latin American according to the dream of Simon Bolivar 200 years ago.

Other rallies are being held in cities across the country in coming days. My comments are:

“We are here to mourn the passing of, in my opinion, the greatest world leader of the 21st century so far. We send our condolences and greetings to the revolutionary people of Venezuela in their hour of grief and stand with them as they prepare to continue the struggle for Socialism of the 21st Century, which Chavez espoused.

“Chavez was a great leader of Venezuela, of Latin America and of the world. He is an outstanding figure for the international progressive movement, because he put the idea of socialism back on the agenda of world politics, in a period of the ascendancy of capitalist neoliberalism.

“He revived the ideas of Simón Bolívar for a united Latin America, proud and independent of all imperial power, especially today challenging the dominance of the United States over the continent. Chavez’ vision inspired the peoples of Latin America, and provided a practical alternative for socialists and progressives all around the world.

“I lived in Venezuela for a several periods, and helped organise solidarity brigades on behalf of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), which introduced scores of Australians and others to the reality of the Venezuelan revolution: the social missions, the communal councils and communes, the unions, the co-operatives and other people’s organisations of the revolution.

“I also personally met Chavez on one occasion, and can testify to the great love he felt for the Venezuelan people, and their great love for him in return. His legacy is one of commitment to the social improvement and empowerment of the common people of Venezuela, of Latin America and of the world.

“The eventual achievement of Socialism of the 21st Century will owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Hugo Chavez, for he is its pioneer, its visionary leader and its inspiration.

“We in Australia pledge to honour Chavez by stepping up our efforts to build solidarity with the Venezuelan and Latin American revolutions, and to fight any attempts by Western imperialism to undermine and intervene against the government and people of Venezuela.

“The ideas and spirit of Chavez will live forever in our hearts and minds.

“Viva Chavez! Viva Venezuela!

“Hasta la victoria siempre!”

ABC TV wanted an interview on the Chavez legacy, March 7:

Hi all,

Just a note to let you know that I was called by an ABC journalist and am due to be interviewed on ABC TV tomorrow morning Friday, from about 7.15am, about Chavez and Venezuela, as a representative of AVSN.

Regards,

Jim Mc

Chavez memorial events draw strong support around the country,
March 19 by Jim McIlroy, SA Sydney branch

More than 200 people packed into the Great Hall at the Addison Road Community Centre in Marrickville in Sydney for the "Todos somos Chavez! We are all Chavez!" memorial meeting on Saturday March 16. Organised by the ad hoc We Are All Chavez Committee, and supported by the Embassy of Venezuela in Australia, the event featured a night of toasts, music, videos, food and drinks in memory of the Venezuelan revolutionary leader.

Event chairperson and Socialist Alliance West Branch organiser Fred Fuentes commented that, “The huge success of the night shows the enormous support and respect for Chavez in the progressive community in Sydney. SA members, the Latin American Social Forum (LASF), and the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN), were the main groups behind the event.

“However, it was significant that, in addition to a many members of the Latin American community, there were delegations from the Iraqi and Lebanese Communist Parties, reflecting the strong support for Chavez in the Arab world, after his firm rejection of Israeli aggression against Palestine and Lebanon.

“The event, organised in less than a week, shows that unity among Latin American solidarity forces can achieve a lot. We need to consider future events to continue to honor the life and work of Hugo Chavez, and learn from his fight for Latin American integration.”

Around 60 copies of *GLW* were distributed on the night. Literature from the AVSN stall was also well received.

On March 13, a night of solidarity with Chavez was held in the Newcastle Resistance Centre, attracting around 30 people. Other memorial events were held in Perth on March 13, and Melbourne on March 16, with others to come.

Senate election campaign 2013

Myself and Reg Dare were endorsed as the SA NSW Senate team for the 2013 elections.

My bio for the election campaign, July 27:

Jim McIlroy, 67, is a veteran socialist activist for more than 40 years, and a current member of the Socialist Alliance national executive. He has been involved in anti-war and solidarity movements since the anti-Vietnam War period of the 1960s, and is an active participant in support for the Latin American people's revolutions. He is a retired public servant, and was a delegate in the Community and Public Sector Union for 15 years. He lives in Chippendale, Sydney, and has two daughters and a grandson.

Socialist Senate candidates say: 'Blame the billionaires, not refugees', July 30

In a joint statement released today, newly endorsed Socialist Alliance candidates for the Senate in NSW Jim McIlroy and Reg Dare stated, "The current hysteria against asylum seekers, pushed by both the Rudd Labor government and the Liberal opposition, is aimed at drawing public attention away from the real source of economic insecurity in this country: the billionaires and their stolen wealth."

"PM Kevin Rudd and opposition leader Tony Abbott are competing to see who can propose the most bizarre 'solution' to the issue of the 'boat people'. Rudd's attempt to outflank Abbott from the right, with the ALP's 'PNG solution' is now being challenged by the opposition's plans for a 'tent city' for refugees on Nauru.

"Both major parties are stoking the fires of racism in Australia in a cruel attempt to scapegoat refugees for the growing social and economic problems in this country. In contrast, Socialist Alliance says, 'Refugees are welcome, racists are not!'

"We say, End all mandatory detention of asylum seekers, at home or abroad. Use funds saved to assist refugees suffering in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. Fully respect Australia's international obligations under the UN Refugee Convention

"Meanwhile, let's tackle the real economic crisis at home: Take back the wealth! Bring the mining industry, the big banks and the energy companies under public/community ownership and control, so that they can be run in a way that recognises Aboriginal rights, the environment and social justice.

"We cannot afford to leave our future to the likes of Gina Rinehart, Clive Palmer and the faceless bankers. If we do so, we won't have a future worth leaving to our children and grandchildren," McIlroy and Dare said.

The Socialist Alliance Senate team will be putting defence of refugee rights and the pledge to nationalise the mines, banks and energy corporations at the centre of their

election campaign in coming weeks.

Jim McIlroy is a long-term socialist, retired public servant, and former workplace delegate in the Community and Public Sector Union for 15 years. He has been actively involved in anti-war and international solidarity campaigns for many years.

Reg Dare is a shift worker in the security industry and member of the United Voice Union. He is a member of the Community Action Against Homophobia (CAAH) in Sydney, and involved in the campaign for equal marriage rights.

For more information on the SA Senate campaign, phone Jim on 0423 741 734 or 02 8070 9331.

'Another, socialist, world is possible': Jim McIlroy, Socialist Alliance Senate candidate for NSW, August 20

Jim McIlroy, Socialist Alliance candidate for the Senate from NSW, spoke recently about the international basis of the SA's main theme for the 2013 federal election campaign. McIlroy has been a longtime activist in the Latin America solidarity movement in Australia. He lived in Venezuela for a year in 2006, and last year travelled widely in South America.

McIlroy, 67, is a retired public servant and 15-year workplace delegate for the Community and Public Sector Union. He radicalised during the 1960s anti-Vietnam War campaign, and has been involved in the socialist movement for more than 40 years:

“Socialist Alliance has placed the call to Take Back the Wealth: Put the mines, banks and energy companies in the hands of the people, at the centre of our federal election campaign this year,” McIlroy said.

“Part of the inspiration for this campaign has come from the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, and the people's revolutions in Bolivia, Ecuador and other Latin American countries.

“The Venezuelan Revolution, initially under the leadership of President Hugo Chavez, and now President Nicolas Maduro, has nationalised, or re-nationalised, key sectors of the economy in that country over the past 12 years.

“These include banking, steel, aluminium, electricity, cement and other vital industries — especially the crucial oil sector. In a number of cases, workers' management and control experiments have commenced.

“The Venezuelan people have also mobilised through popular organisations, such as social missions and communal councils, to defend the gains of their revolution against attack by right-wing forces and US imperialism.

“Parallel, if different, processes have occurred in Bolivia, Ecuador and other Latin

American countries. A spirit of economic and political unity has gained momentum throughout that continent in recent years.

"We in Australia, although our conditions are very different, can learn a lot from the Latin American experience. We can take up the struggle to put our country's massive wealth, now owned by a tiny minority, under public and community ownership and control, so that they can be run in a way that respects Aboriginal rights, the environment and social justice.

"In the face of US and Western threats to Venezuela and other progressive Latin American countries, we need to step up our international solidarity efforts, to oppose any form of outside intervention — military, economic or political — in their internal affairs.

"Chavez called for Socialism of the 21st Century: We in Australia should join in the world-wide fight to show that, in fact, Another, Socialist, World Is Possible: A world built not on private greed, but on social justice and ecological sustainability."

SA: What kind of party?

A debate broke out on the future of SA, promoted by a small group inside the party. I wrote the following contribution to the discussion, October 3:

'What kind of party should Socialist Alliance become?': A critique by Jim McIlroy

The document, "What kind of party should Socialist Alliance become?" has been put forward by a number of comrades as a contribution to the discussion on which way forward for SA. I believe it represents a mistaken analysis and perspective on the party-building tasks we face.

The document notes that the January 2013 SA National Conference agreed on a push to "tighten up" our functioning, away from the relatively looser structures and functions of SA, often inherited from the original SA — which began as a coalition of left organisations.

The comrades state that, "... the agreement lacks clarity about how best to implement a strategy for building a party of such a ["tightened up"] type in our current context. This lack of clarity is undermining the party and making the work of recruitment and integration to the party difficult."

"An important first step toward building this party is recognising that we do not have the party we need today, and, to build such a party requires a conscious and open

effort to get there. It will not naturally or organically come into being, nor will it come about just by working harder.”

But who says it will? This is pushing against an open door. Much of the work of the party leadership and branches over 2013 has been directed precisely at gradually working away at the problems of building a more active and committed membership, and the structures which will facilitate this process.

Proposals to further tighten up our membership expectations, and our overall levels of activism, are being made at the October NC, and floated in the lead-up to our next national conference in June 2014.

“The renewed discussion around ‘tightening up’ the party is not the result of winning political consensus amongst the members of Socialist Alliance. In fact, it is a response to the decline of the party and the social struggle more broadly,” the comrades say.

Says who? SA membership remains around the same level; *GLW* sales and subs are up; SA members are involved in a wide variety of campaigns; the public profile of SA is probably as high or higher than it has ever been.

Yes, there are still real problems of activating members; coordinating our political work; and strengthening the national and branch leaderships. The only realistic way to tackle these issues is by sustained, consistent, conscious effort.

The comrades say that, “Underlying the problems facing the party today is a question of political perspective.... the prioritisation of our broad and loose membership over more active and clarified democratic and educational cultures has led to the disintegration of the direction of our political project.”

But the decisions of the last SA conference, and the work of branches and national leaderships since then has precisely been the reverse: To prioritise building a more activist and committed culture in the organisation, in a variety of ways. Branch leaderships are striving to involve our less active members in the work of the party, in whatever way possible.

Changes to the SA constitution adopted at the January conference have clarified our political aims and objectives, and strengthened the basis of membership to include: “5.2. A Socialist Alliance member is someone who will help build the Alliance, its projects and promote and participate in its democratic structures to the best of their ability;” and, “5.10. The Socialist Alliance is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals and affiliates to participate fully in our struggle for socialism.”

Easier said than done, of course. And we still have along way to go. But use of the phrase, “disintegration of the direction of our political project”, is a gross distortion and exaggeration of the situation of SA today.

“On elections,” the comrades assert, “no social force is coming into motion that would make this theoretical opening into a real one. The kind of party we are building in the here and now should be much more considered about its electoral work. It needs to have a much firmer strategic perspectives on the concrete questions of where to run, with what gains to the party, and how electoral campaigns are linked to our organising work. Simply, we should run in elections where it will clearly develop the existing work of the party.”

This is a completely unreal view of our 2013 election experience. Contrary to the implied criticism, this recent federal election campaign has possibly been the most discussed and planned campaign in our history.

The discussions began last year with the NC decision to make “nationalisation of the mines and banks” our central theme. It continued with deliberations at the January national conference, and again at the June NC.

All branches discussed the questions of where to run in detail, such as in NSW and Victoria, where careful consideration of various factors, including our strengths and weakness, were taken into account. Some branches decided not to run because of lack of available resources.

On the other hand, we eventually decided, on balance, to contest the Senate in NSW with the assistance of a substantial donation from a major union. Other states decided not to run in the Senate, after considerable discussion.

Far from being a reflex response to run everywhere, our electoral intervention was carefully chosen, precisely to “clearly develop the existing work of the party”. These gains are reflected in increased party profile in the community; publicity for our major — and objectively essential — slogan of “Take Back the Wealth”, etc; and new members and political openings obtained during the course of the campaign. Votes were roughly comparable with previous campaigns, up in some seats, down in others.

In my opinion, despite the modest votes received overall, this was one of SA’s most successful election efforts — particularly in terms of having a central political project, the nationalisation call, which won considerable support among more progressive sections of the community (even when we didn’t win their votes).

Under the heading, “The kind of party that is needed in our current circumstances,” the comrades state: “We believe that we should openly define ourselves as a cadre party ... Potentially more than 50% of the membership is inactive, and this has a tendency to make membership meaningless. A cadre orientation means that when we recruit people, they will be aware of the expectations of membership. Members must be active in the life of party building and must be educated in the fundamentals of our politics — not simply agree with a few basic slogans. There should be an expectation that, to

the best of their ability, members should be involved in the democratic functioning of the party, educational programs (regardless of experience) and be involved in either union work, campus politics or social movements.”

In many respects, I would agree with this perspective. However, the big question is: How do we achieve this goal of an active membership, in practice?

Our party constitution already states this aim (Section 5.2, see above). The problem is how, in the real world, to implement it in the challenging political conditions of today.

It is certainly not enough to merely declare a “cadre party”. The construction of an activist, cadre party, which is non-sectarian and involved in the broader class struggle, has been the key task of the socialist movement of the past 40 years or more in Australia.

Contrary to a certain mythology about the old DSP, the development of an fully activist membership remained a serious problem throughout its existence. One structural possibility arising from that history would be the introduction of “provisional” and “full” membership stages into SA: But I personally would be doubtful about such a move, which proved cumbersome and difficult to implement in the past.

“There are no silver bullets,” the comrades note. Absolutely true. There are no short cuts to building an activist, politically committed revolutionary socialist party, and this remains the big challenge before us.

The current process of branch audits of membership is providing us with the real information on which to base a series of measures to tackle the key issues we face — around socialist education, involvement in SA branches and committees, *GLW* sales and sub selling, financial commitment, and activity in union, campus and social movement campaigns. The questions of youth work and youth recruitment/integration, and the development of organisers and branch leaderships, remain the crucial immediate challenges before us, I believe.

The comrades state: “We believe more time needs to be made for strategising, for prioritising and for theorising. A degree of hyperactivism has set in the party, and we race from rally to rally and often don’t see any concrete gains from our often rushed interventions. We want a thorough discussion about political priorities, and for this to be spearheaded in a serious way by the party leadership — not just left to branches who are currently lacking orientation. We want to have an audit of our current leadership structures, a thoroughgoing assessment of their functionality and a discussion on how to build a better interventionist party. the party needs to spend more time on written reports and internal discussion and debate.”

“Time for strategising, prioritising and theorising?” “A degree of hyperactivism?”

What are the comrades saying here? Too much activity? I thought we want more political activism by the party as a whole. The problem is not too much activity, but the need to involve more SA members in political work, either “internal” or “external”. That would be the norm of a cadre party.

We also need to increase the amount of members’ political work under party discussion and co-ordination. This is not only an issue of activism, but of the organisational strength of SA to actually guide this work.

SA has plenty of “strategising, prioritising and theorising” going on at present, but of course we can always do more and better. However, as Lenin stressed, revolutionary theory and action go hand in hand.

Our current leadership and membership structures always need monitoring, but the answer is not to veer in the direction of a permanent discussion club. The proper place for discussions of perspectives are our network of structures: national conferences, national councils, national executives, national secretariats, on the one hand, and branch co-ordinating committees and membership meetings, on the other.

If we want to be more of a cadre party, then we need more “democratic centralism”, not less. The last thing we need is a permanent, uncoordinated discussion, without any mechanism for making decisions on action.

The proper place for open discussion is in the period leading up to national conferences, followed by delegate elections based on clear political orientations. The aim of such discussions is to adopt political and organisational perspectives at conferences by a democratic vote of delegates, with a view to having them tested out over time.

One thing is clear, however: We do need to tighten up our procedures in the direction of building a more cadre-based party, but with a relatively broad base. This may indeed require changes to the structures and functioning of various leadership bodies, and further amendments to the SA party constitution.

The final section of the document remains the most troubling to me. The comrades state: “In terms of theory, it is increasingly clear that we don’t know what our politics are. We shy away from political clarity in a mix of anti-intellectualism and appeals to our broadness.”

The document then poses a series of unanswered questions, each of which deserves a thorough discussion in their own right. But this is precisely what our conference, NCs and other processes have been trying to tackle over recent years, and will continue to do.

I totally reject any idea that our party is guilty of “anti-intellectualism”, in any way, shape or form. Socialist Alliance, in fact, has the most theoretically rigorous, Marxist-based, far-sighted and balanced political analysis of the local and international

political situation on the Australian (and in some respects, world) left.

Green Left Weekly is far and away the best left newspaper in the country, and by some accounts, up there in the world left. *Links* on-line theoretical magazine is an important gathering point for Australian and international socialist perspectives.

In conclusion, we are all fully aware of the challenges facing Socialist Alliance in the present situation of relatively low levels of class struggle in this country. We need to thoroughly and carefully analyse the political situation under the new Abbott Coalition regime, and the key tasks facing the working-class and the socialist movement right now.

We need a sober and balanced analysis of the state of SA today, and how our organisation can be strengthened and, indeed, “tightened up”. But exaggerated criticisms and overstated accusations are not helpful to this process.

Let the SA leadership and membership work together as a team to face the undoubted serious political and organisational challenges we face. Only in this way, can we build the socialist movement in the most effective way possible into the future.

The last few paragraphs of this Pre-Conference Discussion contribution effectively sum up my view of how to build SA and the socialist movement generally into the future. Teamwork and efforts to build socialist unity are the key to constructing a mass-based socialist movement to tackle the challenges of this critical period.

***Green Left* reaches 1000 issues**

Preparations for GLW 1000th issue celebrations by Jim McIlroy,
GLW national distribution convenor, November 5

Following the decision of the SA National Council to launch a major campaign to celebrate the upcoming 1000th issue of *Green Left Weekly*, due on Wed March 5, 2014, a number of ideas and plans are circulating about how to mark the great event.

First of all, messages of support for *GLW* will be sought and published in the paper from the beginning of the year, along with various articles on the role of *Green Left*, and highlights of campaigns run through its history.

The 1000th issue itself will be marked by public meetings, forums, dinners, parties and other forms of celebration, depending on the desires of the branches. Sydney district has already pencilled in a big celebration night for Sat March 15.

One option is to tour our SA councillors Sam Wainwright, from Fremantle, WA,

and Sue Bolton, from Moreland Council in Melbourne, to highlight their excellent work, and to emphasise the link between *Green Left Weekly* and SA party-building.

One idea is to prepare a poster exhibition featuring covers of *GLW* over the years, possibly to tour the country as part of the celebrations.

We also want to highlight the role of GLWTV, and the *GLW* on-line edition, with an advertising and YouTube blitz.

The lead-up campaign will also feature a sales push in 2014 and the campaign to achieve 1000 subscriptions by issue 1000, (boosted by the campus O-Week new Resistance joiners leading up to March).

All SA branches and the National Executive are in the process of discussing details of plans for the 1000th issue celebration. A hook-up of *GLW* sales co-ordinators will be held shortly to plan for the December 2013 sales blitz and proposals for the 1000th issue events.

In early 2014 I attended a rally against shark culling in WA at Manly Beach.

Anecdote from shark rally, February 1, 2014

SA members attended the No to WA Shark Cull rally at Manly Beach, Sydney, on Sat February 1. *Green Left* sold very well to the incoming crowd at the top of the Corso, with its environment cover and article on the Barnett government's shark culling policy.

I was kicking myself for not bringing enough *GLWs*, after selling all the 40 copies I had with me. So, with no more papers, I decided to display our placard, with the Cull Liberals, Not the Sharks slogan.

As I held the placard up prominently, at least 20 people came up and commented favorably or gave me the thumbs up sign. A number of people took photos of me with the placard.

This included two Manly Lifeguards (the professional lifesavers), who took pics with their iPhones, and said, "Right on, brother!" The only protest came from a Liberal supporter who said, "You should be ashamed of yourself for politicising the issue."

Greetings to 1000th issue of Green Left Weekly by Jim McIlroy, February 24

Best wishes and congratulations to *Green Left Weekly* for its 1000th issue coming up. This event represents a milestone in the history of left publications in Australia.

Having been closely involved with the socialist press, going back to the old *Direct Action* from the early 1970s, I regard *Green Left* as a culmination of decades of struggle to create a quality socialist alternative voice, as well as an essential vehicle for helping

to build the Socialist Alliance as a key organisation for working people and the oppressed in this country.

In particular, I would like to congratulate the hard-working editorial and production staff of *GLW*, as well as those who sell the paper in the streets and communities every week. Without their professionalism and dedication, *Green Left Weekly* could not come out and could not be distributed.

Green Left Weekly plays a crucial role in getting out the real news about people's revolutions that are happening right now, such as in Venezuela today under the leadership of the Bolivarian socialist movement, as well as the truth about political struggles in many parts of the world. It also informs the Australian people about the reality of the class struggle in this country, as well as helping to build the people's movements here.

Once again, congratulations on the 1000th, with many more to come.

Jim McIlroy, *GLW* national distribution convenor

Why you need a subscription to *Green Left Weekly* by Jim McIlroy

"Is that the truth, or did you read it in the Murdoch press?" is a well-known slogan in the social media these days. Public confidence in the mainstream media generally is at an all-time low at present.

Tony Abbott and Julie Bishop have been reborn as international statespeople over the downing of the Malaysian airliner in eastern Ukraine, if you can believe the coverage in the Australian mainstream media. Only in *Green Left Weekly* will you read the truth that, "Government exploits tragedy to deflect attention from budget."

In regard to the war in Gaza, according to the dominant theme of the coverage in the Australian media, an equals sign is placed between the Israeli massacre of mainly civilians in "the world's largest open-air prison", and Hamas firing rockets in self-defence. The on-going Israeli siege of Gaza is largely ignored in the media hype.

Compare the majority coverage in most of the big media in Australia, whether Murdoch, Fairfax or ABC, on Gaza and Palestine, with the obvious truth emblazoned on the front page of *Green Left Weekly* on July 23: "World Must Act: End Support for Israel."

Green Left Weekly is the only weekly newspaper in Australia where you can read the truth about the social gains of the revolutions sweeping Latin America, especially in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba, as well as the debates about challenges facing those social transformations.

On refugees, *Green Left* clearly points out the reality of the Abbott-Morrison

regime on asylum-seekers: “Stop Their Racist Cruelty: No More!” *GLW* has weekly coverage of the bipartisan crimes of our governments in victimising those fleeing persecution in their home countries.

And on the climate change emergency, *Green Left Weekly* is essential reading for its challenge to the environment movement and the leading political parties, with its July 30 front-page headline: “After the Carbon Price: What Next for the Climate Movement?”

Green Left has relentlessly exposed the charade of the Abbott-Hockey self-described “firm, but fair” budget. We also see our paper as a forum and a vehicle for promoting and discussing the advancement of the movement among unions and the community to continue the fight against that horror budget.

For all these reasons, and many more, you, your family and friends urgently need a subscription to *Green Left Weekly*. Only then, can you receive the regular, weekly dose of truth-telling which *GLW* brings — and which is so desperately needed in a world of dominant media lies and distortions on so many topics.

Green Left Weekly is currently conducting a major subscription drive over the months to September. If you are a new or occasional reader, now is the time to subscribe and ensure you don't miss out on a single issue.

If you are already a subscriber, make sure your sub is renewed before it expires to make sure you maintain continuity of coverage. Also, you may consider taking out a sub for a friend or relative so they don't miss out either.

A new, introductory subscription costs \$10 for seven issues. Other rates are listed in our *GLW* sub advert. To take out a sub, phone our toll-free hotline on 1800 634 206 within Australia or visit our website at www.greenleft.org.au.

You can also make a donation to our Fighting Fund 2014 at the same addresses. *Green Left* needs both subscriptions and donations in order to keep our alternative, progressive media in production.

Later in the year I penned a piece on SA for an alternative digital journal:

Socialist Alliance contribution to 2014 *Just Us* publication by Jim McIlroy, October 14

Both Liberal and Labor governments have squandered the fruits of the biggest ever mining boom which has come to its peak. The Australia Institute calculated in May 2013 that income tax cuts between 2005 and 2012 have taken \$169 billion out of federal revenue and had disproportionately benefited the richest 10%.

Mining companies and banks have made hundreds of billions of dollars in record profits but paid the smallest ever proportion of these profits in tax.

Meanwhile 2,265,000 people, including 575,000 children, are still living below the poverty line in Australia.

Poverty is a crime for which both Labor and Liberal parties in government are responsible. In government, both parties have boosted the incomes of the rich, in a country where the richest 20% already own two-thirds of the wealth and the poorest 20% are left to share just 1% of the wealth.

Socialist Alliance is campaigning for the mines, the big banks and the energy companies to be nationalised under public/community ownership and control, so that they can be run in a way that respects the environment, Aboriginal rights and social justice.

The Abbott government's 2014 budget is a disaster for working people, the community and the environment. In particular, the proposed Medicare co-payment is a threat to destroy Medicare as a universal, national healthcare system.

Socialist Alliance stands for the defence and extension of Medicare as a universal, free health system, including an end to all subsidies to private health organisations. We oppose privatisation of hospitals and other health services, including the NDIS.

We also oppose the government new "anti-terror" laws, which attack civil liberties and freedom of speech, while preparing the country for new overseas wars.

Our main slogan is: People and planet before profit! ■

11. *Green Left* Goes Full Colour!

***Green Left* goes full colour** by Jim McIlroy, January 28, 2015

Green Left Weekly is now in full colour. For almost a quarter of a century, *Green Left* has been published with colour on the front and back pages, and centre-page spread, with black-and-white print everywhere else in the paper.

The new full-colour look adds to attractiveness of Australia's premiere weekly socialist newspaper, and is an important step forward as we seek to further expand our distribution — in a period when the need for a progressive alternative source of news and comment in this country is more critical than ever.

With the ABC and SBS under attack, and the domination of the Murdochocracy in Australia's mass media increasing, it is crucial that people support the alternative media, especially *Green Left Weekly*. Buy copies whenever you see our sellers in the streets, on rally stalls or at events.

Better still, purchase a subscription to *Green Left Weekly* — only \$10 for seven issues for an introductory sub. Check out our website: www.greenleft.org.au for more information, or phone 1800 634 206.

***Green Left* launches major sales campaign** by Jim McIlroy and Alex Bainbridge, August 7, 2015

Green Left Weekly is launching a national sales campaign with this issue of the paper. We hope to raise our distribution around the country by focussing primarily on widening the involvement of supporters of Australia's premiere weekly socialist newspaper in actively getting it around.

At a time when the crisis of capitalism is deepening internationally and in this country, we need a paper like *Green Left* to get the message out there that there IS an alternative to the neoliberal, corporate system that is rapidly taking humanity and the planet down the road to disaster.

Moreover, we need *Green Left Weekly* even more than ever right now, with the big-business media turning even further to the right, and spreading lies and distortions

about the struggles of the oppressed for their rights and for a radical change in our class-ridden society.

On key topics of the day: Greece, austerity and the Troika; the Latin American revolutions; the crises in the Middle East; and at home: Aboriginal rights; the struggles for women's and LGTBI liberation; union and workers' campaigns; the truth about climate change and the environment; and the growing resistance to the Abbott government's attacks on living conditions and human rights; *Green Left Weekly* gets out the real stories, week after week.

We need your support in helping us to distribute the paper (and its on-line edition) more widely. Already, members of Socialist Alliance are strongly involved in selling the paper in the streets, suburbs and at rallies and other forums each week.

We want to increase this activity. But we also seek assistance from regular readers and supporters of *Green Left* in regularly taking small bundles of the paper, and distributing them to friends, workmates and in their local communities.

We plan to publish regular reports during the period of the drive, from mid-July till the end of August, of experiences in getting the paper around. Please contact us on 1800 634 206 to join in the campaign.

GLW sub drive 2015

Green Left launches big subscription drive by Jim McIlroy,
October 14

Green Left Weekly is launching a major subscription drive from this issue until the end of the year. We want to get Australia's premiere socialist weekly newspaper out into the hands of more readers than ever over the next eight weeks.

Why? Because in a period of heightened right-wing attacks on civil liberties and free speech, the truth about defending the interests of the people must get out there even more broadly.

Green Left Weekly is receiving increased attention as the most recognised journal of progressive news and ideas in this country. Even far right Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi thinks so:

"Mere minutes after it happened, Senator Cory Bernardi lashed the ousting of Tony Abbott as 'treacherous'. He also made it plain he considers Malcolm Turnbull to be a man who stands well to the left of Karl Marx and who, far from being prime minister, is best suited to hanging around outside train stations, trying to flog copies of *Green Left Weekly*." — Andrew Masterson, writing in the September 27 Melbourne

Age.

We think that's all highly unlikely. But, if anyone wants to get the best coverage of Australian and international politics from a genuine left-wing viewpoint, then they should buy and read *Green Left Weekly*.

Better still, subscribe, and receive regular, weekly copies of the paper in your letterbox. That way you won't miss out on *GLW*'s unmatched news and opinion, firmly from the side of working people and the environment.

You can also choose to receive *Green Left Weekly* as an E-subscription if you wish.

An introductory sub to *Green Left* is only \$10 for seven issues. And don't forget to renew when your initial subscription expires.

Get ready for *Green Left* 25th anniversary year! by Jim McIlroy, *GLW* national distribution convenor, January 12, 2016

2016 is the 25th anniversary of the launch of *Green Left Weekly* in February 1991, coinciding with the US invasion of Iraq in the first Gulf War. This year Australia's premiere weekly socialist newspaper will be celebrating the achievement of a quarter of a century of publication and of campaigning for radical social change and environmental sustainability.

Let's make sure that the circulation of our paper this year matches the significance of the occasion. The first issue for 2016, number 1080, is due out next week, dated Tuesday January 19.

All Socialist Alliance members and branches should begin to gear up for a big team effort this year to get *GLW* around more widely than ever, starting with the first issue. This means discussion of *Green Left* distribution, both sales and subscriptions, at our initial branch executives and general meetings.

Meanwhile, let's make sure we collate and record any additional sales made for the last issue of 2015, number 1079, over the summer period, up to and including this coming weekend. We will then be able to finalise the sales figures for the whole of last year, which promise to achieve an average national sales over the 800 mark per issue.

Hopefully, everyone has had a pleasant break over the Xmas-New Year period, and are now refreshed and ready to go for a big year of political struggle and activity in getting our eco-socialist message around with *Green Left Weekly*.

My 70th birthday

In February 2016 I turned 70. I celebrated with a big party. From Melbourne Dave Holmes emailed me and I responded:

Dear Jim,

I can't be at your celebration on Saturday. But here are my very best birthday wishes for the big day.

I can't quite get my head around either of us being 70 (well, I am almost there). I recall once being at your place after we had been playing tennis up the road and your dad was looking somewhat pensive. Apparently he had just turned 40!

I will always credit you for my discovery of socialism. I remember you coming over to *Ardross* and brandishing a copy of *Towards Socialism* and saying you were a socialist. Light-bulbs went off in my head too and they are burning even more brightly today. I know it is the same for you.

Well, 50 years have passed and we have certainly followed through on our youthful convictions. We haven't given up and we haven't gone mad either. Beyond that, there is only endless work to be done, for as long as we possibly can and keep trying to set a good example to the younger comrades.

If you're not coming down to Melbourne beforehand, I'll see you at the May conference. Once again, many happy returns from your long-time friend and comrade,
Dave

Hi Dave,

Thanks so much for the thoughtful and kind birthday greetings. We have had a long and close friendship and comradeship over many years (decades), which I value very highly. I like to think we are still the very closest of friends, even if we don't see each other so much in recent times.

I always say that we came to socialist commitment together in dialectical stages. First, coming to a general social/political awareness at school. Second, when I discovered Marxism via *Towards Socialism* and *New Left Review* in the mid-1960s. Third, when you recruited me to the SWL/SYA via *Direct Action* in the early 1970s.

And, having made that discovery of the ethical and scientific necessity of socialism, we have never wavered. And how could we? Nothing has changed in that historical truth; the urgency has just increased to a critical point right now.

The remarkable phenomenon of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the US (a mass movement of young people for "democratic socialism", whatever that may mean, but it's a good start), in the leading countries of the English-speaking imperialist

world, is truly shaking up the political status quo. How can this general sentiment be organised and turned into a political weapon against the system? That is the number one question.

It gives me hope and more optimism as I turn 70. Look on the bright side, I say.

It all makes a lifetime of struggle for socialism feel that much more worthwhile as you become “old”. (Is 70 old now, not sure. Look at Bernie!)

Anyway, I will have an extra drink for you at the party, which looks like being bigger than Ben Hur at this stage.

I will see you around Easter as I am planning to come down to Melbourne to see the family and also to attend the Marxism Conference.

Best wishes,

Your “old” friend,

Jim

Green Left as a 'scaffolding'

I wrote a contribution to the PCD for the upcoming SA National Conference:

In Defence of *Green Left Weekly*: Why Socialist Alliance needs a 'scaffolding' by Jim McIlroy, Sydney Central Branch, May 25, 2016

Overview

In summary, it is my strong opinion that the perspectives outlined by the “21st Century Socialism Tendency” in its various documents published so far, if implemented, would lead the complete destruction of the Socialist Alliance (SA) as an organised, national, activist socialist party.

The result would be a collection of separate city-based bodies, essentially discussion groups, with no properly organised, nationally coordinated financial base, no effective national democratic decision-making structure and no co-ordinated, national political perspectives and campaign priorities. It would overturn the entire project of decades of work towards building a genuine, broad-based socialist party in Australia.

Much more will no doubt be said on these issues in the course of the discussion, but I want to concentrate for now on one critical question raised by the tendency under the heading of “Political Alternatives for Socialist Alliance: Media”.

“The supposedly Leninist idea that ‘the paper is the scaffolding of the party’ has for too long been elevated from a historically specific tactic to the level of a principle in many small left parties ... Trying to function as a hard-copy left-wing news source is

well beyond our current capacity.”

As a consequence, the tendency proposes that we “discontinue *GLW* and *Links* [SA's on-line theoretical journal].”

I believe this is a fundamentally wrong proposal, which would, just as much as any of the others suggested by the tendency, lead to the collapse of the Socialist Alliance as an organised socialist party. To see this in context, we need to look more closely at the famous argument by Vladimir Lenin in the early 1900s that the Russian revolutionary party needed an “all-Russian newspaper” in order to build and co-ordinate itself.

“A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this respect it may be compared to the scaffolding erected around a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour,” Lenin wrote in *Where to Begin*.

Despite the challenges facing all forms of print media in contemporary society, I believe that the role of *Green Left Weekly* in helping to build and maintain the Socialist Alliance is just as important in the age of digital media as the “All-Russian newspaper” was in Lenin's day.

And this particularly refers to the print edition of the paper, while remembering that *GLW* is now increasingly being distributed and read on-line as well. The two versions of the paper are complementary, not in conflict with one another.

In comparing the revolutionary newspaper to a “scaffolding erected around a building”, Lenin was not just talking about the role of the paper in spreading news and information to a politically aware public, but to its crucial role in helping to organise the members and supporters of the party, inform them, educate them, and develop the political line of the party on important issues of the day, as well as explaining the key perspectives of the party on vital issues.

Despite the advent of various forms of digital media, which of course have an essential role to play as well in the work of any party today, *Green Left Weekly*, and specifically the print edition, is the whole package: news of popular struggles, views on key issues, promotion of Socialist Alliance spokespeople and events (eg, the current federal election campaign), brought together in one interrelated whole, as an essential party-building instrument.

The entire process of preparation, publication and distribution of *GLW* helps to unite the party, train up members and supporters in writing and selling the paper, and be the main public voice of Socialist Alliance. Without the public face of *GLW*, and its active selling in the streets, campuses, markets, public forums and social movement

rallies, SA would be lost in the plethora of committees and groups which abound in the progressive milieu today.

Selling *GLW* plays a vital role in developing party members as activists, increasing political skills and self-confidence, and attracting new members and supporters to Socialist Alliance. The challenge of taking a socialist paper out into the community, and standing to some extent against the mainstream of capitalist society, helps to steel comrades for the struggles ahead, and helps to give them greater identification with our entire socialist project.

The role of *Green Left* in unifying and welding the party into a campaigning force, not just a coalition of discussion clubs, is critical today — more than ever when social media, along with its positive role in aiding the dissemination of information, discussion and publicity for movement events, can also be a passive medium, and can be a substitute for real collective action.

For Socialist Alliance, the development of the tools of social media should be in addition to *Green Left Weekly*, in both its print and on-line versions, not an alternative to it.

US socialist leader James P. Cannon developed the idea of the weekly party newspaper as a “combination tool”. The paper needed to simultaneously meet the needs of the three broad categories of readership: the politically-educated party members, longer-term non-party readers who are developing politically, and readers coming to the paper for the first time.

That is precisely the role that *GLW* plays for Socialist Alliance today. And that role can be enhanced, but not replaced, by on-line communications of various kinds.

Green Left Weekly is famous and respected around the world, as one of the leading progressive, eco-socialist newspapers anywhere. It is a major source of information for many people in the movements, as well as a course material in journalism studies.

This standing has been built up over 25 years, and cannot easily be replicated by any new publication, whether on-line or in print. It is a unique achievement, which could only be made possible by the work of a party, made up of dedicated activists, committed to achieving a new, socialist society.

The staff of *GLW* work tirelessly on a very basic income. And this team, which is made up of experienced as well as new comrades, would not, and could not, undertake this amazing task of producing a high-quality, weekly publication, in print and on-line versions, unless they were members of a party which supports them, provides the political framework for the paper, and is capable of organising nationally to distribute the paper, and provide the financial resources to maintain it.

Now, I would like to take up some of the specific comments in the tendency's

statement on media: "... we are now thoroughly in the 21st century, and print media is no longer the primary vehicle for consumption of news and ideology. For young people in particular the primary source for this content is online."

While it is true that young people especially seek much of their "news and ideology" on-line, this does not mean that they no longer read newspapers and magazines. My own experience with selling *GLW* a great deal in the streets, on campus and at rallies and meetings convinces me that youth are quite willing to read a progressive paper which challenges the mainstream media agenda, in its various forms.

And, in the blizzard of on-line media which exists already, *Green Left* stands out as a unique source of news and views on the social movements, crucial topics of the day, and international struggles. There is nowhere else in the Australian media, on-line or print, which brings together the news of social movement campaigns and a comprehensive coverage of national and world-wide events from a left-wing perspective, as *GLW*.

The tendency statement continues: "Trying to function as a hard-copy left-wing news source is well beyond our current capacity. By the time articles are submitted, subbed, published and finally sold in the street, the content is about a week out of date. Our sales and subscriptions are at a very low level despite year-in year-out 'sales and subs drives'. The publishing and distribution of the paper is a huge drain on time and financial resources for our small party, and these resources could be better spent today. Additionally, the paper is not the only — or even the most effective — way of engaging face-to-face with people at demonstrations or key public spaces (markets, events, etc). Such face-to-face engagement can be done through party stalls, focussing on key upcoming party and movement events, selling pamphlets and merchandise, online subs, giving out free propaganda, and conducting surveys and petitions."

Well, producing and selling the *Green Left* newspaper is clearly not beyond our current capacity, because we have been doing it successfully for 25 years and are still producing the best-quality progressive paper in Australia. Currently, key articles are now put up online on the *GLW* website and on Facebook quickly, prior the the next publication date.

In any case, most of the content of *GLW* does not really date, and in fact much of it cannot be found anywhere else in this country's media at all.

Our sales and subscriptions are not "at a very low level" at all. Both sales and subs have overall increased over the past three years, and the sales and sub drives have played an important role in this.

Of course, we always seek to increase our sales and subs base. And this remains a major challenge, but we are continuing to work hard on this task.

Moreover, these sales and subs drives are not only about the paper directly, but about involving more SA members and supporters in identifying with and helping to distribute *Green Left*. They play an important part in helping to create a more activist, cohesive party, which is a key aim adopted by Socialist Alliance national council meetings and conferences over the last several years.

Yes, production of *GLW* costs considerable money, but it is not a “drain” on our resources, but an investment in building the profile and membership of SA, and the broader mass movement toward socialism in the longer run.

Moreover, it is precisely the paper version of *Green Left*, which raises considerable funds from sales, which contributes to allaying those costs. On-line subs contribute some, but still limited, funds.

Unless we moved to eliminate the free, on-line complete version of *GLW* on the website, this is likely to continue for some time. Politically, it would be very unwise to go down that path, as the free on-line *Green Left* receives a large number of hits from Australia and around the world, which would mostly be lost if it moved to on-line subscription only, as some of the mainstream media are doing.

Paper sales of *Green Left* have been, and can be in the future, a major source of funds — in fact, a profitable operation for SA branches.

As to the role of *GLW* selling in assisting face-to-face contact with people at events and in the streets, this has been critical to our success in building the profile of SA over the years. In no way is this counterposed to other activities at stalls, and the distribution of other party and movement material.

But it is *Green Left* that is unique to SA. Other forms of publicity, while essential, are overall an addition to our propaganda armoury — and are not in conflict with distributing the paper, but all part of our vital, and extensive, political project.

Under the heading, “Concrete alternative”, the tendency include the following key proposal:

To “Discontinue *GLW* and *Links*”, and in their place, to “Create a new online popular analytical media project using examples such as *Jacobin* and *Novara Media* as inspiration.”

This would be a recipe for disaster for the Socialist Alliance. Whatever the merits or otherwise of *Jacobin* and *Novara Media*, these on-line magazines are not party-building publications.

If we closed down *GLW* (and *Links*), we would lose our most potent and publicly recognisable voice. *Green Left Weekly* is the heart and soul of Socialist Alliance. Without it, we would lose our distinctive identity to a considerable extent.

The proposal to shut down *Green Left* is (along with other proposals to fundamentally

change our key organisational and political perspectives), is, in the end, a plan to dissolve Socialist Alliance.

The organisation and its members should reject the proposals advanced by the tendency absolutely, and reaffirm the overall project that Socialist Alliance has embarked upon over many years.

Very importantly, Socialist Alliance overwhelmingly rejected the minority proposal to close down *Green Left Weekly* and *Links*, and continued to build and promote these vital publications in all forms — print publication, and increasingly through digital form and social media. This is the force of the future for strengthening the voice of both *Green Left* and SA as a growing socialist organisation.

GLW: Spreading the word about people's movements by Jim McIlroy, July 19, 2016

For 25 years now, *Green Left Weekly* has been spreading the word about people's movements, in Australia and internationally. Every week, our sellers are out there, in the streets and at protest rallies and meetings, distributing the country's best progressive weekly newspaper to a wide audience.

Starting with this issue, *Green Left* is mounting a special drive over six weeks to increase our sales and the involvement of supporters in the distribution effort. We are calling on our readers and supporters to help us in this campaign by not only buying the paper, and better still a subscription, but consider taking a small bundle of *GLW* to distribute to friends and colleagues in your area.

At a time when the corporate media is becoming more shrill in its attacks on progressive ideas and movements, and when the ABC and SBS are being further cut back and restricted, we need *Green Left Weekly* even more than ever. Assisting us to get *GLW* out to more people, and helping to spread the truth about the neoliberal offensive on communities and the environment, is an important part in building the people's movements for radical change today.

For example, *Green Left* was prominent at the Black Lives Matter rallies in several cities over the July 16-17 weekend. And *GLW* was there at the anti-Pauline Hanson protest outside the ABC studios in Sydney on July 18.

Our coverage of the Socialist Alliance campaign for the July 2 federal election, especially the path-breaking SA team for the NSW Senate led by Aboriginal activist Ken Canning, was vital in getting a radical alternative voice out to the public. The SA theme, "For a people's movement against racism and corporate greed", shows a way forward for the future of the progressive movement today in this country.

Come and join in our campaigning stalls and street stumps, as well as on the

university campuses, to help us with our drive to get the word out about the people's struggles for social justice and environmental sustainability.

The most important part of our campaign is to boost the numbers of people who distribute the paper, wherever you are in the community.

We want to increase our *GLW* presence and distribution into wider areas. Can you help?

We're asking our regular readers and supporters to consider taking a small bundle of the paper to distribute to friends, workmates and local communities.

Please contact your local Socialist Alliance branch or phone *Green Left Weekly* on 1800 634 206 to join in the campaign.

Like the article? Subscribe to *Green Left* now! You can also like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

Then, I and Fred Fuentes were invited to present a panel on Latin America at the Historical Materialism Conference towards the end of 2016 in Sydney:

The 'Pink Tide' in Latin America: 'Left populism' or social revolution? by Jim McIlroy, September 15, 2016

Suggested possibility for a general title for our panel above: My Paper: The crisis in Venezuela: "Chavismo" under challenge.

The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, initiated by President Hugo Chavez more than 15 years ago, has been variously described as "left populist", "left social democratic", or as the early stages of a social revolution. Chavez himself coined the term, "Socialism of the 21st Century", to describe the process of radical social change emerging in Venezuela under his leadership.

The popular upsurge that has shaken the power of the capitalist oligarchy and brought about radical changes in the position of the poor and the working people in Venezuela is based not only on the actions of the government of Chavez and now President Nicolas Maduro, but on a profound social upheaval, based on democratic community organisations, such as the social missions, the communal councils and the communes.

It is debatable whether using the term "left populist" to denote the Chavista movement is very helpful in the specific circumstances of contemporary Venezuela, and the radical movements in other countries of Latin America. The changes initiated in Venezuela are far-reaching, and potentially revolutionary, but are now coming under severe threat from a resurgence of the right, backed to the hilt by US imperialism.

While the ideology of Chavismo is eclectic, and gathers radical elements from many leaders and social theorists of the past and present, the fundamental dynamic of

the Bolivarian Revolution is profoundly revolutionary. This paper will discuss the recent history and current state of Venezuelan politics, based on first-hand experience and observation of the process over several visits to the country, including a year spent living in Venezuela in 2006.

Speaker: Jim McIlroy, long-time socialist activist and current executive member of the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN). Co-author of the book, *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*. (Resistance Books, 2008). ■

12. Postscript

To summarise my life back in Sydney from 2012-13, our terrace house in Chippendale became a haven for myself, Coral and her brother, Geoff. I describe the inhabitants of our home as two old codgers and a “codga”.

We generally get along well enough, with the main arguments being what to watch on TV — *Gardening Australia* or the *World's Greatest Railway Journeys*. Otherwise, we spend our time throwing shoes at the latest outrageous reports on the news.

I have been heavily involved in the distribution of *Green Left* over these recent years, participating in *GL* stalls in the Central Tunnel and Sydney Town Hall on a regular basis. As well, I conduct a weekly Sunday stump at the Addison Road Markets, and other places.

In addition, I attend all the movement rallies I can, around climate action, refugees, Aboriginal rights, union rights, international solidarity and other key issues. I love selling and distributing *Green Left* to as many different people as possible.

My other main political involvement has been as a branch co-ordinating committee member of the Sydney Central SA branch, and involved in various national leadership bodies over time. I also attend meetings of various movement committees around the city.

I value the support and collaboration of all my colleagues, including Sydney Central branch organiser Rachel Evans, and all the other comrades, whose leadership and vitality make socialist political life a real pleasure, on top of the many challenges we all face in the struggle. I also acknowledge the contributions, great and small, of all those who have been involved in the progressive movement and in building the socialist party over many years.

This pretty much sums up my daily life as I become a veteran of the socialist movement. I fully intend to continue to be as active in struggling for socialism as I am able for the rest of my days.

That's my story so far.

***Dare to struggle! Dare to win!* ■**

Appendix: A Summary of My Life Up to the 1970s

Suburban beginnings

My origins were as a classic post-war “baby-boomer”. Born in the inner Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn in 1946, I was the eldest of a family of four children. My father Ian was a CSIRO research scientist, my mother Cecily trained as a social worker.

As was the way in those days, my mother had to give up her career to raise the family, which became an increasing source of tension in the marriage in later years and contributed to their eventual separation and divorce in the 1970s.

In the early period, however, we were regarded as the perfect Spock-generation family: boy (myself), girl (sister Fiona), boy (brother Bob), and girl (youngest sister Fran). All separated by a year or two.

And we did experience a happy family life in the 1950s and early 1960s, first when we moved to the seaside suburb of Parkdale, and later further down Port Phillip Bay to Mount Eliza.

The family atmosphere was a humane and progressive one, which was reflected both in my father’s involvement in peace movement and other causes, and my mother’s interests in progressive literary and cultural areas.

Cecily was a member of the Wright clan, pioneer pastoralists of the New England region of northern NSW, and celebrated in her cousin Judith Wright’s well-known book, *Generations of Men*. Judith, one of Australia’s foremost poets, is my godmother. Unfortunately, the poetic inheritance in myself did not survive a few adolescent scribbles.

My first recollections of politics are tied up with the left-wing literary scene in which my parents moved in the Mount Eliza area, associated with Stephen and Nita Murray-Smith and other friends linked to the journals *Overland* and *Meanjin*.

I must have begun to absorb progressive and socialist ideas from the many

conversations and debates I listened to and increasingly participated in as an impressionable teenager in the late 1950s and early '60s, at events such as the annual *Meanjin-Overland* cricket match and at after-tennis drinks and so forth.

At the same time, my lifelong friendship with Dave Holmes, which began at primary school in Mount Eliza and continued on to secondary school and university, was a central factor in the development of my ideas.

Although Dave may remember things a little differently, my recollection of long discussions between us on all varieties of topics, from literature, to science, to religion, to social and political affairs, throughout our school period and beyond, was important in developing both our understandings of the world — although our lives did take separate paths in the early university years for a while.

My viewpoint on the international “big picture” was notably expanded during a trip overseas with my family during 1964. We travelled through Mexico to the USA, where we stayed in Phoenix, Arizona, for some six months. I attended Arizona State University, and met young people from America and many other countries, learning many things about other cultures and political ways.

I also travelled across the US, and began to understand issues such as racism, and observe class differences, more closely.

I remember writing long letters containing my observations back to my English teacher (and headmaster) at Mentone Grammar School — and was stunned to find out when I returned that they had been read out at assembly to the whole school!

A notable event during this time was the 1964 US presidential election campaign. Arizona was the home state of the infamous Republican war-hawk Senator Barry Goldwater, who was campaigning on an openly pro-war basis. I well remember the bumper stickers of the time: Back to the Store in '64! (The Goldwater family owned a giant retail complex outside Phoenix.)

In the end, Lyndon Johnson, who had campaigned on a “peace” platform, won easily — and immediately proceeded to escalate the war in Vietnam, the most decisive event in the story of my whole generation, and a turning point in my own life.

In 1965, I entered the University of Melbourne to study Arts, spending the first two years as a resident of the Methodist Church-run Queens College in Parkville. My main recollection of the religious content of the place was that the theologs (the student clergy) of a church committed to a total ban on alcohol were renowned for having flagons of red wine hidden under their beds.

I, too, imbibed my share of cheap red and white wine, attended numerous student parties in Carlton, and engaged in the full curricula of student activities of the time.

This was the period of youth social and cultural break-out, of revolt against the

restrictive standards of the 1950s, which preceded the gradual development of the fully blown youth radicalisation of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

When then Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared Australia would send troops to support the US intervention in Vietnam in 1965, a major change occurred in the political life of the country — a change which would transform every aspect of our previous comfortable existence. I joined a number of other students in opposing the war. But in the beginning, we were a minority, even on campus.

Vietnam & conscription

In early 1966, the introduction of conscription hit the country like a bombshell.

I remember being personally shocked to find that I and a number of my friends had all won the Lottery of Death — that is, marbles bearing our birthdates had been plucked from a barrel, and we were chosen to join the Australian army to go to Vietnam to kill Vietnamese villagers.

In the early ballots, a high percentage of birthdays were chosen. But I and my friends all decided we were not going to collaborate in Menzies' crusade to suppress the Vietnamese people's struggle for national self-determination.

Remarkably, none of us did go in the end. I took the common path for students of deferring military service by managing to stay at uni for some seven years, by one means or another. I remember many hand-written adverts on the uni library noticeboard along the lines of, "Engineering student urgently requires marriage partner. Please contact X." Others left the country, feigned insanity, went underground or whatever, until conscription finally ended in 1972.

But conscription focused our minds very clearly on the slaughter in Vietnam, and the need to end it as soon as possible.

It was a bitter struggle from the very start. And the antiwar forces were quite isolated in the early days. I remember countless teach-ins, meetings, debates, gradually developing into pickets, marches and demonstrations, quite moderate in size at first.

We fought out the ideological battle very fiercely in those days, confronting the right-wing forces of the National Civic Council and the Democratic Labor Party, over the issue of the "threat from the north", the infamous Gulf of Tonkin incident, and the CIA's White Paper on the alleged Communist North Vietnamese takeover of "democratic South Vietnam".

The domino theory (that Asian countries would fall to Communism like dominoes once Vietnam was lost) was a major issue of debate. As our radicalism developed, we

began to hope it was true.

My own radicalisation was a gradual process. In 1965, I joined the ALP and the Fabian Society (an organisation founded by the ideologists of British Social-Democracy, the Webbs and H.G. Wells).

In 1966, we campaigned tirelessly for the ALP under Arthur Calwell's leadership. It was one of the most disastrous defeats Labor ever suffered at the hands of the Coalition, but it was also one of the more politically principled campaigns in ALP history.

Calwell came out clearly for withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam and an end to conscription.

The elections were bitterly contested, with the DLP putting up terrifying TV adverts with marching Communist jackboots and the stain of the red menace flowing south from China to Vietnam, to Indonesia and thence to a cowering Australia.

It was vicious, lying propaganda, but undoubtedly effective. It scared the Australian electorate into giving new PM Harold Holt a huge victory.

I remember our immediate revenge on the Country Party supporters at Queens College was to drunkenly sing "The Red Flag" late on election night to keep the faithful from their sleep.

This was also the period of the mass anti-Communist purges in Indonesia, which had a deep effect on me, and strengthened my revulsion against imperialism and its client regimes in the Third World.

My courses at university included Indonesian studies, both the language and history, and I clearly remember doing a research paper on the Suharto coup and its bloody aftermath, and feeling revulsion at the cover-up being perpetrated by the Australian media over the issue.

In late 1966, US President Johnson toured Australia to boost the Vietnam war effort, under Holt's inane slogan of "All the way with LBJ!"

It was a turning point in the antiwar struggle. His motorcade was to drive past Melbourne Uni on the last day of campus year, for heaven's sake!

Thousands of tired and emotional students poured out of the pubs next to the campus, only to be enraged to find that the president's route had been changed.

They raced to the city centre and confronted the motorcade. That was the day two students made world headlines by throwing red and green paint (the Vietnamese NLF colors) on Johnson's limousine, showing to an international audience that the Australian antiwar movement was strong and growing.

On campus, I had joined the MU Labour Club and the Democratic Socialist Club, and became more involved in the organisational side of the antiwar movement and

the growing student rights movement.

We began to question not only the war, but all aspects of a repressive, corporate-dominated society, which waged war against Third World peoples abroad and exploited and oppressed its own people at home.

In 1967, I travelled overseas again with my parents to Egypt, where my father took up a post with the UN, training students there in his field, applied meteorology.

I studied for a semester at the American University, and began to appreciate the complex politics and history of the Middle East. This understanding was given a sharp boost with the outbreak of the Six Day War, when Israeli jets attacked airfields right near our home in suburban Cairo.

It was quite a frightening experience, and heightened my awareness of the role of Israel as the front line of US imperialism in oppressing the Palestinian and Arab peoples.

1968 was a crucial year, internationally and in Australia. First, the Tet offensive in Vietnam showed graphically to the world that the National Liberation Front would not be defeated, and that the US-led war was doomed.

Second, May-June 1968 in France showed the revolutionary potential of the student-worker alliance, and that a socialist revolution was possible (although very difficult to achieve) in an advanced capitalist country.

I vividly recall seeing the television coverage of the pitched battles of the French students with the police, with high hopes that a revolution was being born. I also watched with intense interest the debate relayed from the BBC among the youthful leaders of the French movement about the way forward.

Third, the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia showed that democratic socialism could be a reality, but the Soviet invasion dashed our immediate hopes for an end to Stalinist rule in the socialist bloc.

Finally, we had our own student revolt in 1968, with the “Monash Uni Soviet”, in which students occupied Melbourne’s second-largest campus in the face of heavy police pressure, over university and antiwar issues.

The Maoist Worker Student Alliance had become quite strong on Monash by this stage, and later grew on Latrobe Uni as well.

WSA had initiated the annual July 4 marches on the US Consulate in Melbourne, which became a rallying point for the student left, despite invariably bitterly cold and raining weather.

By this stage, I was pretty well a convinced Marxist, and a keen reader of *New Left Review* and other radical publications.

But I was not attracted by the ultraleft theories of the WSA and others, rather I still

remained within a general ALP left framework.

During the late 1960s in Melbourne, there was no other appealing option for a radical student like myself, so I remained within that student activist milieu.

The antiwar movement was now a gigantic force, but even we activists didn't realise just how big. Preparations for the first Vietnam Moratorium of May 1970 were growing apace. The movement was now very broad, with local committees and suburban protest actions breaking out all over.

There were many debates on strategy and tactics, over mass action versus small-group direct action, over demands such as "Troops out now!" versus "Negotiations now!"

It was a time of great ferment of ideas, and a tremendous movement of people's power.

On the morning of the Moratorium, hopes were high, but even the activists were amazed at the crowd which filled the entire centre of Melbourne, bringing the city to a standstill. More than 100,000 people marched to stop the war, coming from every age group and walk of life.

The stunning success of the May and September 1970 Moratoriums in Melbourne and other cities marked the beginning of the end of Australia's intervention in Vietnam.

Joining the socialist movement

For myself, it was the prelude to a new period in my radicalisation and my commitment to the project of socialism.

Following the moratoriums, I came into more regular contact with Dave again. He had recently joined the Socialist Youth Alliance (formerly Resistance), and was keen for me to do so as well.

I remember playing hard to catch at first. I saw myself as an "independent Marxist", and was reluctant to give up that "independence".

In addition, I needed convincing that the Trotskyist SYA were the answer, having operated for so long within the complex cross-currents of the Melbourne student left.

Finally, after being most impressed with *Direct Action* newspaper, and convinced by Dave's arguments, I joined SYA in early 1971.

Immediately, I was swept up in the activism and enthusiasm of the new movement. Within a couple of months, I was presenting a report on the worldwide youth radicalisation to the SYA national conference held at the Pram Factory in Melbourne, Easter 1971.

The new branch went ahead in leaps and bounds. We operated out of a two-storey shopfront at 140 Queensberry Street, Carlton, with some comrades living upstairs.

These included, at that stage, the founder of the Melbourne branch John Percy and his then companion Jenny Ferguson.

John's dedication to the new project was infectious, and I soon found myself a regular seller of *Direct Action* during peak hour outside Flinders Street station, at the university, in Carlton, and elsewhere.

The sales rate was phenomenal at that time, because of the heightened political radicalisation of the period, and the novelty which a socialist paper sold boldly on the streets represented then.

We kept up a fairly frenetic pace, I recollect, with virtual weekly pickets in the city square, over a variety of issues — solidarity with Ireland, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, and Bangladesh.

On the latter issue, we started taking up collections for two national liberation organisations in the Bengali struggle, the Mukhti Foj and the Mukhti Bahini. However, not certain how to get the funds to them, or even exactly who they were, we ended up sending the money to the Indian Section of the Fourth International, if I'm not mistaken.

We were a bit politically raw at the time, but nothing if not keen!

Our main competitors in the youth movement in that period were the Maoists of the WSA, and this competition could get willing.

During the preparations for the June 1971 third Moratorium in Melbourne, huge organising meetings of activists were held in the Richmond Town Hall, involving some 500 or more people.

These were tumultuous meetings, with a large contingent of ferocious Maoists, the more genteel CPA members, ALP left-wingers, church progressives and independents of various kinds.

Our modest but well-organised SYA contingent of 20-30 had to keep together for protection from the taunts of the Maoists, bearing their red banners on large poles, and their ice-pick badges, with their slogan, "The only good Trot is a dead one!"

One famous incident occurred when my friend and comrade Alan Dalton was driving up to the town hall in his old Holden with a load of SYAers, including myself, on board. A crowd of Maoists started jeering as we approached the front of the hall, and Alan nervously scraped into one of the pillars outside the entrance.

The Maoists jeered, "Your driving is as good as your politics!"

Embarrassing, yes. But the whole experience of the cut and thrust of Moratorium mass movement debate taught us all a great deal about the left, tactics and strategy,

and comradeship.

In the following few years, we were in competition with the WSA for recruitment of radical youth in Melbourne.

As the crisis of Chinese Stalinism deepened, the Australian Maoists became quite desperate, and even resorted to violence on occasion against their left opponents, especially ourselves.

I recall that prior to one highly charged May Day march, we actually spent a day in Sherbrook Forest training with a comrade who knew karate. He taught us how to use a cake of soap in a sock as a defensive weapon.

Fortunately, we didn't have to use them at that time. But there were a couple of fist fights between Maoists and ourselves on other occasions.

In the end, the once-mighty WSA dissolved into the sand. And SYA continued to grow into the strongest and most influential socialist youth movement in the country.



After completing my BA (Hons) in 1969, I spent a couple of years at the Melbourne University Department of Political Science Department working on a Masters and tutoring part time.

My thesis was on a hot topic of the time, the growth of teacher unionism. And I spent many hours interviewing teachers in schools around inner Melbourne.

In the end, political activism called and I never managed to finish the thesis. (In fact, the tapes were eventually used to record meetings of the Socialist Workers League's national committee, I believe).

At the end of 1971, the annual deferral of my call-up finally ran out. I received a letter ordering me to attend a medical interview prior to conscription.

Figuring that going underground as a draft resister was not the solution, nor was conscientious objection. the idea occurred to me that as I had suffered a bad case of eczema over the previous few years, I would be rejected as medically unfit to travel to tropical climes.

Of course, as luck would have it, the eczema went away shortly before the medical. I sat in my car, outside the armed forces medical centre in Melbourne, rubbing furiously on my arms with a rough cloth to bring back the rash. Naturally, by the time I had sat half an hour in the waiting room, the evidence went right away.

Plan B was to pretend to have a psychological problem. I attempted to appear depressed and unco-operative with the doctor.

In the end, to my joy the doctor announced that I was medically unfit for the army because of "flat feet"! (I don't actually have that particular ailment, so it appeared the

military was not anxious to have yet another political malcontent in their ranks, at this late stage of the game).

Whatever works! Another comrade was rejected after appearing at the medical with the selected works of Lenin under his arm!



In 1972, I undertook a Diploma of Education course at Latrobe University. This was the period of intense confrontation between the students and the administration over antiwar and educational issues.

WSA was the dominant political force on campus at the time, and a lengthy occupation of the administration building and student strike took place, including the arrest and banning of Maoist student leader Barry York.

I recall being on strike myself for a lengthy period. Somehow we managed to pass the course, possibly aided by the fact that our main education lecturer was long-time radical Geoff White.

In 1973, I commenced my brilliant career as a teacher, at the Broadmeadows Boys Technical School, right near the giant Ford plant to the north of the city.

This was a challenging experience, as teaching English and social studies to boys who had already been streamed into technical apprenticeship courses was not an easy task.



As events turned out, my rapid learning curve as a teacher was brought to a halt after less than six months when the national leadership of the SWL requested me to transfer to Sydney to work full time on our paper *Direct Action*.

(The SWL had been established early in 1972, with John Percy, myself and others as founding members of the Melbourne branch.)

So, I entered a new phase of political and personal life as a journalist and proof-reader on *DA*. This was the pioneering period of the paper, and quite a struggle.

Direct Action was published three-four weekly at that stage, depending on how quickly the small staff could get an issue together. We gradually increased the frequency to a regular fortnightly.

Production was a painstaking battle against the pressures of relatively primitive technology (based on an IBM typewriter), and our inexperience in publishing a semi-professional newspaper.

All contributed copy from the party branch members had to be retyped, at one stage twice when we first moved to justified columns!

Lay-out, proof-reading, photo production and so on was so time-consuming that we needed one or even two all-night sessions to complete the paper.

We always chased the cheapest printer around Sydney. For some time, we used a printer at Windsor, on the western outskirts of the city, which meant a lengthy drive in the early morning to deliver the proofs.

To avoid an accident we always sent two people, one to drive and the other to keep the driver awake. We would drop off the copy, then park on the Hawkesbury River bank till the afternoon, when we would pick up the printed newspapers and drive back to town.

I remember doing the *DA* print trip many times with our then editor, Nita Keig, who played a key role in the founding period of both Resistance and the SWL.

In the long run this exhausting program was a scenario for shortening your life!

I vividly recall those incredible all-night sessions, which became more and more difficult when we eventually moved to a weekly publication schedule, following the November 1975 Canberra Coup period and the elections that year, in which Labor was decimated.

We intervened strongly in the crisis of that year, producing issues of *DA* emblazoned with the slogan calling on the ALP and ACTU leadership to “Call a General Strike!”

The paper was so popular and successful that the party made the decision to go weekly.

Shortly after, the then editor, the United States’ then best-ever export to Australia Allen Myers, declared: “I’m too old for this!”

So, we launched a campaign to eliminate the all-nighter, which was eventually successful.



I always enjoyed not only writing for the paper, and helping with its production, but selling it as well.

It is the best method I know for keeping in touch with popular opinion, and with the cross-currents of discussion and debate among our main audience, the progressive sector of society.

The best sales spot I ever had was a pub run through the heart of the Sydney centre during the mid to late 1970s.

I regularly visited around 20 watering holes during a Thursday evening, taking about five hours or more.

I would generally score about 40-50 for the evening — and I made quite a few sales as well!

Needless to say, by the end I would be rather the worse for wear, and had to stagger on to the George Street bus to take me back to Chippendale. Amazingly, I managed to make it home every time.

This pub run provided a kaleidoscope of the political and industrial issues and people of the progressive movement of the time.

Sadly, many of the pubs I regularly frequented have disappeared or been transformed into yuppie havens, far away from the working class hotels of a previous era. ■

