

The SPARK

For workers' power and international socialism

ISSN 1177-0724

The Spark

May 2011

North Africa: ongoing process of revolution

**Horticultural workers
strike in Warkworth**

**Gisborne students
protest for free busses**

Christchurch earthquake

Mana Party launch

**Villawood detention
centre detainees resist**

**Socialism and women's
liberation (part 3)**

**Bookreview:
*Privatising Parts***

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Monthly magazine published by



The Spark April 2011
Vol. 21, No. 3, Issue No 245

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Gisborne school students organise 2000-strong demonstration for free busses

Jared Phillips, coordinating editor of *The Spark*

“That a group of Girls’ High students researched the problem and approached the Ministry of Education last month, with a supporting submission from the city’s high school principals, not only shows great initiative but puts the best face to this issue. Some will quibble with the fact today’s march, which started at 9am, cut into valuable school time. The direct action to try and address an historic injustice is to be commended, though. They certainly have our attention” – Jeremy Muir, Editor, *The Gisborne Herald*.

On Wednesday April 13 up to 2000 high school students and their supporters (with some reports of more) made a Hiko (demonstration march) through the main streets of Gisborne, a city on the East Coast of New Zealand’s North Island. They were raising a demand for free school busses for students who live in the Kaiti suburbs.

Kaiti comprises much of the eastern side of Gisborne and all four of the city’s high schools are located in the western side. When family budgets can’t meet travel costs, students from Kaiti have to walk up to 5 kilometres to get to school. This is often the case as the Kaiti suburbs constitute the majority of the poorer suburbs of Gisborne. The suburbs are literally on the other side of the bridge and populated predominantly by working class people including unemployed.

Protest organised primarily by school students

It was reported in a *Gisborne Herald* editorial (6/4/11) that the hiko was initiated by Gisborne Girls High School students, in a Year 12 health class, who had carried out a research project which found that non-attendance amongst students who live in Kaiti grew in the period leading into winter because of transport issues. As well as affordability other issues were identified such as

problems with minimal shelter at bus stops and bus overcrowding.

From there the Girls High students combined with students from Lytton and Boys’ High and won support for the protest from teachers and other adults. The students indicated that they were highlighting “a serious social justice issue” in Gisborne (*Gisborne Herald*, 6/4/11). Heather Gorrie, principal at Girls High School, said that the issue impacts on more than 700 students every year.

With a majority of the demonstration being comprised of school students, an estimated two thousand people attended. The *Gisborne Herald* (14/4/11) reported a turnout of more than two thousand and *Newstalk ZB* (13/4/11) reported one thousand.

No account of ability to pay

Income in Kaiti is well below national averages. The national median income in June 2010 was NZ\$27,508 from people of all sources of income. At the same time the national median income for wage and salary earners was NZ\$41,444 (*Statistics New Zealand, Income Survey June 2010*). The annual median income in Kaiti is just NZ\$19,525 and in Outer Kaiti (which is furthest from the high schools) the median income is NZ\$16,300 (*The Gisborne Herald*, 13/4/11).

Adding to that broad picture of inequality, families who live in the idyllic beachside suburbs of Makorori and Wainui – which are predominantly middle and upper class areas – can without cost send their children to the Gisborne high schools on busses that pass straight through Kaiti. The editor of *The Gisborne Herald* (6/4/11), wrote



Around 2,000 Gisborne high school students and their supporters demonstrated for free school bus transport, April 13.

“Farcically, we have students from upmarket ‘rural’ Wainui riding free to school through low socio-economic Kaiti, where families pay \$10 per week for each child to attend high-school by bus”.

The Wainui area, as well as the Makorori area is outside of the 4.8 kilometre range from Gisborne’s high schools, allowing school students in the area to be considered rural in accordance with the Ministry of Education’s criteria. Students who live within 4.8 kilometres of a secondary school also have fully subsidised transport. It is because the Kaiti students live in an urban area outside of a 4.8 kilometre radius that their parents and caregivers are required to pay \$1 per child for each trip to and from school.

The action and the government response

The hiko started at 9am at Waikirikiri primary school in Outer Kaiti and went on to Te Wharau primary school. At both schools there was strong support given from teachers and parents, as it is their children who will soon be amongst the more than 700 pupils affected by the issue each year.

On occasion the march brought traffic to a stop. A small group from the march attended a meeting at the offices

of the Gisborne City Council. One councillor asked them why they didn't bike to school like when he was a child and they responded that bikes were often too expensive and traffic has changed and there are more people getting hurt on bikes (biking to school has actually become a thing of the past, the bike sheds at many schools have been taken down for some years).

The marchers shouted various chants including 'Free Busses – Up Attendance!' and ended the protest at Girls' High at around 12 noon.

The Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, who is also National's MP for Gisborne is refusing to make an exemption to the 4.8 kilometre rule for the Kaiti students. Local people argue that there should be an exemption



Minister of education and National MP for Gisborne Anne Tolley

because Gisborne is the only city in which all of the high schools are located on one side of the city. Tolley resorted to snide comments and rejected the

link between bad weather and truancy, noting that rain and the distance between Kaiti and the high schools had been present for decades. In other words she doesn't accept an historic injustice, one that has been present for thirty years, and seeks to maintain the status quo whereby the poor have to walk long distances in bad weather to get to school.

Tolley said that "There is no equity issue other than distance". School students, teachers, principals, parents and mainstream news editors think differently. The whole issue highlights not only inequality, but the deceptiveness of the type of democracy we live in; a broad community wants something to change but the government tries to ignore the community and ridicule it. Now it's up to the students, parents, and anyone who supports local democracy to escalate the issue.

Horticulture workers strike north of Auckland

Becky Broad, Workers Party, National Organiser

Striking horticulture workers in Warkworth have faced down the threat of a lockout, and settled their first Collective Employment Agreement (CEA). Members of the Northern Amalgamated Workers Union at Southern Paprika Ltd have been trying to achieve a CEA since July 2010. The workers, who all originate from Kiribati and Tuvalu, grow capsicums under glass. The union went to mediation at the Department of Labour, and then on to the Employment Relations Authority (ERA), but months of meetings produced very little progress. Eventually, the workers decided to strike over the Easter break (when the Company had cancelled all leave).

"The union members were provoked by a comment made by the production manager at the ERA, who stated that some of the workers were only 'worth

eight or nine dollars per hour," says union organiser Mike Kyriazopoulos. The immediate response from the management was to threaten to lock out the workers for a week after the strike. However, by Easter Friday the Company had changed their opinion of the value of the workers and began negotiating a return to work. On Easter Monday, the workers endorsed a deal that included a CEA based on a 25 cent per hour pay rise, protection of hours of work and enhancements in bereavement leave. The settlement also provided for the lifting of the threat of a lockout, and the withdrawal of a Final Written warning issued to a unionist who had participated in an earlier overtime ban.

The outcome of this struggle represents an important step forward towards organising the notoriously low-waged and insecure horticulture industry.



Southern Paprika Limited grow operation in Warkworth.

Christchurch - In the aftermath of a disaster

Byron Clark, Workers Party Christchurch branch and editorial board of *The Spark*

At the beginning of April an open air forum was held in Linwood for Christchurch residents affected by the February earthquake who wanted to raise their concerns and form community networks. About 70 people gathered in Linwood Park, opposite the still closed Eastgate Mall. The eastern suburbs were badly damaged in the earthquake and according to those in attendance there are still significant problems in the area. Sewerage related issues are a common concern, with pipes damaged in the coastal suburb of New Brighton. Portable toilets are sparse in some areas where they are needed, such as places where people do not have outdoor space for digging a 'long drop' or a vehicle for disposing of the waste from chemical toilets. 25 incidents of 'exploding toilets' have been reported in the east of the city, where high-pressure cleaning hoses caused sewage to burst out of toilet bowls.

Unsurprisingly jobs were an issue for a lot of people. The quake has made thousands unemployed. The hospitality industry has been hard hit, as have other industries concentrated in the central business district- 54 per cent of workers in communication services were based in the CBD as were 56 per cent of those working in finance and insurance. The Press has reported that many former white collar workers are now taking up labouring jobs in demolition and security. Others are

leaving the city for seasonal work, or permanently. The governments wage subsidiary packages has been extended but scaled down. The CTU has said the scaled down package means employers may not cover full wages for workers or may instead simply lay workers off. According to Marty Braithwaite, CTU Earthquake Response Coordinator, "When much of the recovery process is so slow, reducing this support at such an early stage is a mistake". The central business district is not due to reopen until October.

Democracy and transparency were key issues for those at the meeting. The new Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) will govern Christchurch for the next five years with what John Key called "extraordinary powers for extraordinary times." this has been criticised by civil libertarians. "The general vibe of the paperwork so far, and the Government's previous track record, suggests a subsidiary role for local councils." said Victoria University senior lecturer Dean Knight. By "the Government's previous



Residents receive food parcels at the Linwood Salvation Army depot

track record," Knight may be referring to the sacking of the Canterbury Regional Council (Ecan) in 2010 and its replacement with unelected commissioners.

Fletcher Building, whose stocks rose on the day the quake hit and remain high, is getting government contracts and there are worries about profiteering. The Otago Daily Times reported that the company is expecting a three billion dollar increase in revenue as a result of post earthquake rebuilding.

With the nights getting colder people believed home heating was going to become a much bigger issue. While

most of the city outside the still cordoned off central business district has electricity, a large number of houses are missing chimneys or are not as weather tight as required due to damage to roofs and walls. Other issues raised were heritage buildings, access to the central city, and potential respiratory problems resulting from silt and materials from demolished buildings. The rally was organised by Action for Christchurch East, and further meetings have since been held.

Revolutionary processes ongoing in North Africa

John Edmundson, Workers Party Christchurch branch and editorial board of *The Spark*

The world is now more than four months into the new Arab revolution and it is clear that the process is far from over. Two dictators have been given their marching orders (Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak) and another, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, is looking increasingly insecure, if somewhat stubborn in facing his almost inevitable loss of power. The revolutionary movement sweeping the region is complex but seems irreversible. The Arab nation has awoken and seems determined to shake off the dictatorships that it has suffered ever since the French and British Imperialists carved up the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI and asserted their authority over the region.

The Arab Revolution and Pan-Arabism

During the First World War, the British promised the Arab nations independence in exchange for their assistance in rising

up against the decrepit and failing Ottoman Empire. Britain set about cultivating leaders within the region with whom they could do business, and in conjunction with the French, commenced the carving up of the Ottoman Empire into new nation states which would be dependent on Anglo-French support for their security. In this way the Arab nation was divided in a largely artificial way into many separate countries, but the sense of Arab nationhood has never been completely crushed. It has reemerged at numerous times, most dramatically after the Egyptian revolution by the "Free Officers' Movement" under Gamal Nasser. Similarly, the Ba'athist movement, which led Iraq until the US invasion which deposed Saddam Hussein, and which, under the Assad Dynasty, still clings to power in Syria, emerged as an explicitly pan-Arabist movement. In fact, in 1958, Syria and Egypt merged to form the United Arab

Republic, in which Yemen also indicated an interest. Whether or not the current revolutionary movement leads to the breakdown of the colonial borders remains to be seen, but the revolutionary movement certainly exhibits strong pan-Arab nationalist sentiments and a desire for greater integration across the Arab world.

Opposition & counterrevolution

Needless to say the various reactionary regimes around the Arab world were terrified by the sudden upsurge in anti-government activism. The response of the leaders of the various countries has differed in approach but not in intent. The lesson for the autocrats from the defeat of Zine al Abadin Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was that a much more forceful defence of their privilege would be required. Blood began to flow in the streets of Algeria,



Libyan opposition fighters near Ras Lanur, Libya

Bahrain, Libya and other countries of the region. That bloody repression of the popular demand for greater freedom and democracy has resulted in open warfare and Western intervention in Libya, but also of a series of massacres throughout many other countries of the region, including, more recently, Syria.

Israel has been equally shaken by the “Arab Spring”. While Israel has traded for decades on its status as “the only democracy in the Middle East”, it has in reality required that status, not only to justify its assertions of moral authority but also, quite simply, because democratic governments throughout the Middle East and North Africa would not tolerate the servile stance that the regional autocracies have taken towards the United States and its Zionist ally. The response of the revolutionary people of Egypt to the pro-Israeli and pro-Western policies of the former Egyptian government is evidence of this. Calling for a demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy, the rallying cry included the call “Be there or be like Mubarak!”

Libya

The most extreme outbreak of violence associated with the Arab revolution has occurred in Libya, where a state of virtual civil war now exists. Within days of revolution breaking out, almost the entire country was in the hands of anti-Gaddafi forces. Even some working class suburbs of the capital, Tripoli, saw demonstrations in opposition to the Libyan leader. The regime’s violent response to the demonstrations was followed by the storming of the military barracks in Libya’s second city, Benghazi and the defection of some units of the Libyan army. Since then the fighting has seesawed backwards and forwards throughout the east of Libya while almost all western centres, with the exception of Misurata, have fallen.

The opposition in Libya has demonstrated little in the way of genuinely progressive politics, not surprising since Gaddafi has maintained a monopoly over the rhetoric of left politics in the country. In the absence of any organised and deep-rooted radical movement, the Benghazi based opposition formed the Transitional National Council, a self appointed body



Over one million Egyptians protested in Cairo’s Liberation Square, demanding an end to the blockade of Gaza Strip, Friday April 9th.

with a largely unannounced membership, whose identified membership includes high profile and high ranked defectors from the Gaddafi regime. The TNC initially declared that it would defeat Gaddafi on its own, with no outside support, and in the early days of the revolt that looked possible, with almost all the country under rebel control and the army putting up little resistance. However when it became clear that the army was simply choosing its moment to respond, and the rebels were driven back in rout, the TNC quickly changed tack and called for the West to impose a “no fly zone”, an offer French President Sarkozy was quick to champion.

The compromised nature of the Libyan leadership has created acrimonious debate on the left, with some arguing that the moment the West intervened the rebels true colours were revealed, or at least, that they had become indefensible since the interests of Imperialism would completely dominate a new Libyan state. Others reluctant to support the rebellion argue that the West, and the “Benghazi rebels” seek to partition Libya along the lines of the old Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, despite the lack of any serious evidence that any parties seek to partition the country. Still another group argue that for all his faults Gaddafi has a history of anti-imperialism and has raised the standard of living of the Libyan people and that his “socialism” should be defended.

On the other side of the debate, it is argued that the revolution in Libya has at its roots, the same issues that face the people of the Middle East and North Africa as a whole – namely corrupt autocratic government and a stultifying lack of freedom. That the West has opportunistically seized the opportunity given it by Gaddafi’s violent and tenacious determination to retain power does not invalidate their right to freedom and democracy. Further, Gaddafi’s “socialism” looks very empty when his sons’ extravagant playboy lifestyles are considered. Any anti-imperialism Gaddafi may once have had have long since been traded in for a place in the War on Terror and a vicious role in keeping Europe “free” of African migrants.

Certainly the revolution in the Arab world is far from secure and Libya is one area where it may be arrested, but that process could occur as easily through a Gaddafi victory as by a Western-backed rebel victory. Certainly the West itself is very cautious about extending too much support to their cheerleaders in the TNC. The TNC has no real authority and the West is very aware that it can not in any way guarantee that it will deliver a liberated Libya into the hands of imperialism. The jury is still out, but whichever way events unfold, the people of Libya are as entitled to freedom as any other people in the region.

Workers republic? Yes, Governor-General? No

Mike Kay, Workers Party, Auckland

Buckingham Palace issued the following statement on 7 March: “The Queen, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister of New Zealand, has been pleased to approve the appointment of Lieutenant General Jeremiah Mateparae as the next Governor-General of New Zealand.”

The man chosen to replace Sir Anand Satyanand came as something of a surprise to the pundits and, reportedly, to Mateparae himself. He is the first soldier to hold the post for 40 years. Of the previous eight Governors-General, five have come from a legal background and another was an elderly former Prime Minister, Sir Keith Holyoake.

Some have questioned whether this is the “Paul Henry effect”, a reference to the disgraced broadcaster’s comment to John Key that the next Governor-General should be “a New Zealander who looks and sounds like a New Zealander”.

That may have weighed in the balance. But far more significantly, Mateparae’s appointment functions as a double whammy by the government: it strengthens the forces of both militarist



The next Governor-General, Jerry Mateparae, and Prime Minister John Key.

nationalism and conservative Māoridom. This follows on, in lockstep formation, from the spectacle of Victoria Cross recipient Col. Willie Apiata being

paraded across Marae under the previous Labour led government.

The Governor-General is the representative of the Queen in Aotearoa. Many people these days see the monarchy as a harmless bit of fun, just another aspect of trash mag celeb culture.

The day to day role of both the Queen and Governor-General is indeed largely ceremonial. Yet the holder of the post of Governor-General possesses major reserve powers. Although rarely used, these include the power to dismiss a Prime Minister, dissolve parliament and call new elections, refuse to pass legislation into law and grant a pardon to someone who may have been wrongly convicted.

One of the most infamous examples of these reserve powers was enacted in 1975 when the Australian Governor-General dismissed a left-leaning Labor government headed by Gough Whitlam, and installed Liberal Party leader Malcolm Fraser as caretaker PM.

The post of Governor-General is an outdated vestige of feudalism. It needs to be abolished as an elementary step towards a workers republic.



Victoria Cross recipient Col. Willie Apiata taking tea with Prince Charles

Campaign launch of the Mana Party

Mike Kay

The meeting hall at Mahurehure Marae in Auckland was packed to overflowing with activists keen to hear Hone Harawira launch the new Mana Party yesterday (April 30). The first approximately 1 1/2 hours of the meeting consisted of pōwhiri and speeches in te reo Māori. The following account describes the speeches in English that followed.

The hui opened with CTU Vice-President Māori Syd Keepa plainly stating: “Māori are poor,” and went on to highlight the need to speak out for Māori and the working class. He was followed by Professor Margret Mutu, who described Harawira as the only Te Tai Tokerau MP to have helped Ngāti Kahu, having given support to the occupation of Maheatai/ Taipa Pt. She also praised his support for those arrested in the October 15, 2007 police raids, and spoke of the need for a party to “protect us from the worst excesses of the rabid racism of Parliament.”

John Minto commented that much of the audience resembled a reunion of the 30th anniversary of the anti-Springbock tour movement. He said that while other Māori Party MPs had “melted into the warm embrace of John Key and the National party,” Hone Harawira was “a really good rock to build a new party on.” Miriama Pitama raised the call for a “movement of resistance.” Speaking of Harawira’s former colleagues, she said that it was clear that “the people are not with the Māori Party.”

Veronica Tawhai said “the system is not designed for Māori. Rangatahi [youth] don’t vote, because they can’t see the point... we need someone who will stand up in Parliament and say: ‘we do not recognise the sovereignty of this whare over Māori lives.’”

Former Green MP Nandor Tanczos described the Labour/ National duopoly of NZ politics as a choice between “tweedledum and tweedledumber,” with the small parties functioning merely as “clip-ons”. He talked of the need to change the system itself, with Mana potentially opening up a “third space”

for a coalition of radical Māori, green and left parties. He also struck a note of caution that “you can’t just build a movement around the leadership of one person.”

Tanczos said it would be a “tragedy” if the Mana and Māori Parties went to war with each other, adding that the new party represented a diversification of representation for Māori, in the same way that you would not expect all pākehā to be represented by a single party.

Te Tai Tokerau Electorate Chair Lisa McNabb emphasised how poverty, increases to GST and the cost of living had impacted on communities in the Far North. Annette Sykes observed the shift in mood since the Canterbury earthquake from an initial feeling of collective responsibility to help those afflicted, which more recently has retreated to an individualistic reaction against the better off having to pay a larger share of the rebuild. Sykes lamented that this creeping individualism had also affected Kaupapa Māori, and that Māori needed to reassert their belief in the collective.

Sykes drew comparisons between Harawira and Michael Savage (who established the welfare state due to his “love of the nation”) and Norman Kirk (whose government was supported by Pat Hohepa and Matiu Rata). She talked of the need to reclaim Aotearoa from “foreign ownership and privatisation.”

Hone Harawira opened his speech by saying Mana would “reject the politics of fear - and reject the politics of compromise... we deserve better than weak and accommodating leadership.” He referenced both the 1835 Declaration of Independence as well as the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi as principles to be affirmed. He insisted that Te Reo should be in the hands of the people, not bureaucracies and government departments.

He denounced the government for “driving people into poverty and penalising them for being poor.” He also criticised spending such as “\$36 million being wasted on this bloody yacht race in



Hone Harawira speaking at the Mana Party launch in Auckland April 30

San Francisco,” saying the money would be better spent on “emergency heating in the poorest suburbs of Christchurch that have been forgotten.”

Harawira talked of the need to stop the sale of state assets and provide people with affordable food, shelter and power - “simple shit,” as he put it. He affirmed the right to a “decent day’s pay for a decent day’s work”, and the need to “overturn the 90 days slave labour law.” Addressing unionists who were “still stuck on Labour,” he reminded them that union membership went down over the period of the last Labour-led government.

Harawira proposed a 1% financial transactions tax, or “Hone Heke Tax”, that would “chop down GST.” He stated the most important aim of the movement was to “reclaim the mana of our people” - not just Māori, but workers and “our Pacific Island cousins, who continue to be brought over here as cheap labour to be exploited and sent home at the end of the season.” He announced his intention to call a by-election in Te Tai Tokerau, to seek a mandate for the Mana Party, so that he may return to Parliament as its first MP.

Matt McCarten wrapped up the hui by commenting that “the right wing had unfinished business from Rogonomics,” and that it was “the people in this room that will lead the fight against it,” concluding that “after 35 year of trying, for the first time I feel we’re finally getting it right.” He encouraged the audience to sign up with Mana so that it could become a registered party. When the meeting ended, they did so in droves.

Workers Power 2011

National conference of the
Workers Party

Hamilton Trade Union Centre
34 Harwood St 3/4/5 June



Full schedule

Friday evening June 3

5.30-6pm Registration and open

6.00pm TOPIC: Who should workers
support this election year?

Friday evening

Saturday

Saturday June 4

9.30 -10am Registration

International Struggle

10.10 Workers Party special
Palestinian liberation,

10.30 Mike Treen, Global
(GPJA): The international

international picture too

10.50 John Edmunson, V
Middle-East

11.25 Break

30 Years since the

11.40 Karl Crook, former
Remembering inside Ha

12.00 Topic: South Africa

12.35 Lunch

Economics for w

1.30 Mike Kay, Workers
within capitalism.

1.55 John Edmunson, W
state of the NZ economy

2.00 Ross Crook, Unite d
we need?

2.50 Break

3.10 Class struggl

3.10 Anthony Main, Soci

3.30 Paul Benedek, Soci

June 4

and open

Struggle

Speaker: How and why we support

Peace and Justice Auckland

Balance of forces and

day

Workers Party: North Africa/

The Springbok tour

Communist Party of New Zealand:

Milton Rugby Park

today

Workers

Party: How working people are exploited

Workers Party: The finance sector crisis and

y.

Delegate: What type of union movement do

es in Australia

Socialist Party Australia

Socialist Alliance (Australia)

Sunday

Sunday June 5

10-10.30am Registration and open

10.30 Perspectives on class and Maori liberation

Bernie Hornfeck, Socialist Worker, and other friends from Rotorua

Ian Anderson, Workers Party

12 Lunch

12:30 Strategies and tactics for rebuilding the Left

12.45 Joel Cosgrove (Workers Party), Paul Benedek (Socialist Alliance - Australia), Anthony Main (Socialist Party Australia), Joe Carolan (Socialist Aotearoa).

Speakers from International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Worker

Open floor discussion

4.30 Concluding remarks and thanks

Australia: Villawood riot sparks protests at other immigration detention centres

The following article by Will Morrow was first published on the World Socialist Website at wsws.org

The Workers Party is not affiliated with the World Socialist Website or the organisation which contributes its content. However, this article provides a good overview for working and progressive people in New Zealand who want to know more about the unfolding struggle being carried out by the detained refugees and their supporters.

The Australian Labor government's repressive "border protection" and mandatory detention regime has produced another angry protest by detainees, this time at the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, in Sydney's western suburbs.

Two Kurdish asylum seekers—Amir Morad Masoor, 22, and Mahdi Darabi, 24—began a roof-top protest at Villawood on April 20 after the appeal stage of their determination process was rejected. Both men had been in the

detention centre for 15 months. They were joined later that day by 11 other asylum seekers, who had been in detention for more than a year, with one reportedly held for more than 24 months. Most of the protestors had exhausted their final appeals to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and were unsure of their fate.

Tensions among detainees escalated during the day and then erupted into angry protests. According to unconfirmed reports, an estimated 100 asylum seekers began rioting. Nine buildings, including a computer room, kitchen and medical centre, were burnt to the ground. No one was injured as fires burned into the early hours on April 21.

One of the protestors, Iranian Majid Parhizkar, later told the media that the asylum seekers were desperate. "We just want attention," he said. "We did not hurt firemen. We did not attack security. I'm not an animal, I'm human."

As of today, three men are continuing

the rooftop demonstration, displaying banners such as "We need help" and "We are human not criminal", and demanding the right to speak to a UN representative.

Protests involving over 200 refugees have also erupted at the Curtin immigration detention centre in Western Australia's remote north-west. According to refugee advocates, an estimated 100 Curtin detainees are currently involved in a hunger strike. Another refugee at Christmas Island has sewn his lips together in protest over conditions at the over-crowded facility.

The Villawood riot marks the second such incident in Australian immigration detention centres in less than six weeks. In March, asylum seekers at Christmas Island demonstrated over squalid living conditions and long processing times. The Labor government responded to that protest by mobilising hundreds of Australian Federal Police (AFP), which used tear gas, flash-bang grenades and bean-bag bullets against asylum



Asylum seekers at Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Sydney took to the rooftop of the centre in protest against their circumstances as detainees.

Refugee uprising, Sydney

seekers. (See: "Australia: Ongoing repression produced asylum seeker protests").

As was the case following the Christmas Island protests, the Gillard government has reacted to the Villawood protests with intimidation and repression. Immigration Minister Chris Bowen immediately declared that those involved in the Villawood protests would be punished "with the full force of the law." He threatened to reject their visa applications on "character grounds" under section 501 of the Migration act.

"These are people who are not happy that they have not been accepted as refugees," Bowen declared. "If they think they will change their visa outcome, if they think they will be accepted as refugees because of this sort of protest action, they've chosen the wrong government and the wrong minister, because that won't be happening."

On April 21, AFP and New South Wales police officers took control of the facility, which is managed by Serco private security service, and banned all visits. Social Justice Network spokesman Jamal Daoud told the World Socialist Web Site that he had been arrested and physically removed from the centre by police and fined \$350 fine for trespass after he attempted to gain access to the detainees.

On early Friday morning, AFP officers in full riot gear stormed a room in the facility where refugees had been moved to safety from the still smouldering fires. Many were still undressed and asleep when police ordered them to leave the facility, manhandling those who did not immediately comply.

Asylum seekers were forced to sit outside on the ground for more than 90 minutes, with some ordered to lie down on their stomachs. Twenty-two detainees were then removed to the maximum security Silverwater jail, where they are still being held without charge. Police claim they are being detained for questioning.

Protests by refugee support groups and the New South Wales Council of Civil Liberties over incarceration of the men in Silverwater have been brushed aside by the Department of Immigration, which claims it can designate any facility an "alternative place of detention" under



Australian Federal Police officers in riot gear, inside the detention centre

the Migration Act.

Immigration authorities and federal police are now attempting to starve the three remaining Villawood rooftop protestors into submission. Acting Prime Minister Wayne Swan yesterday defended these measures, declaring that "the authorities should take every responsible course of action to remove" the rooftop protestors. Like his immigration minister, Swan threatened that all those involved in the Villawood protest would "feel the full force of the law."

Elected to power in late 2007 claiming it would introduce a "more humane" immigration policy, the Labor government is now incarcerating more than 6,500 people in detention, compared to only 500 when it took office. Prime Minister Julia Gillard claimed last October that children would be released from detention but the numbers continue to rise. More than 1,000 children are now being held, 500 of which are either orphans or unaccompanied minors.

The mandatory detention system is clearly driving asylum seekers to breaking point—five asylum seekers

have committed suicide since September, including three at Villawood. Now the media, with the backing of the opposition parties, is pressing the Labor government for even tougher and more punitive measures.

One proposal was made by Paul Kelly, the Australian newspaper's editor-at-large, in an April 23 comment titled "Refugee riot highlights a dilemma." He declared that the Villawood events "pose a significant test" for the Labor government and called for amendments to the "character test" of the Migration Act's section 501, to make it easier for the minister to reject asylum seekers.

Under current legislation, the "character test" can only be applied to asylum seekers if they have been found guilty of an offence that carries a jail term of more than 12 months. "[Bowen] may need to seek a quick review of the relevant provisions of the act, explain its shortcomings to the public and, if required, propose tougher amendments to the law," Kelly wrote.

The Labor government will no doubt respond to Kelly's call to implement further punitive measures.

Refugee uprising, Sydney

The minority Labor government can count on parliamentary support from the Greens. While Greens feign concern over the plight of the refugees and posture as critics of Labor's immigration policies, the organisation has pledged to ensure Labor remains in office.

Asked whether the Greens would consider withdrawing their support for the government over Labor's treatment of refugees, Greens MP Adam Bandt gave a categorical "No" on Channel Ten's "Meet the Press". "We'll keep using our space in parliament to push for action on the broader suite of refugee policies and move towards a more human solution," he said.

While appealing for humanitarian window-dressing, the Greens, like Labor and the Coalition, fully back the policy of so-called border protection and forced repatriation of asylum seekers. Far from being treated like criminals and made political scapegoats for the failure of successive governments to provide decent jobs and public services, these refugees, who have risked their lives to flee oppression and persecution, should be immediately freed and granted full citizenship rights.

Melina Adlparvar, a refugee who

has gained permanent residence in Australia, spoke to the WSWS outside the Villawood detention centre on April 23. Hussan Alsaegh, her husband, was in detention for three months in Christmas Island and then transferred to the Villawood facility, where he has been held for just under a year. The two initially met in Iran but separated and moved to Australia independently. Adlparvar discovered her husband was in Villawood late last year.

"Less than a month ago he received a rejection for the third time on his application," she said. "After that, he wanted to kill himself. 'I can't believe it,' he would tell me. 'Why do I have to stay here?'"

Adlparvar described the lengthy appeal processes: "They told us that if we want to apply through the Federal Court or the High Court we will be put on a waiting list and have to wait for at least six months. If he is rejected there, we have to apply to the immigration minister, which will take another six months."

She explained the effect that the situation had had on her own life. "I'm studying at TAFE two days per week, but I simply do not have the energy

to go there anymore, and my mind is not working. My psychologist has told me that I need to stay at home and rest because I have developed deep depression over my husband's situation. I do not have enough money to buy food, and I need to bring food to my husband because the food they offer there is unhealthy and he finds it unbearable."

Adlparvar has also been in contact with Majid Parhizkar, one of the three demonstrators still involved in the rooftop protest. She said there had been a marked deterioration in his mental condition.

"He has been in detention for 20 months," she said. "Less than a month ago, his final appeal for residence was rejected. He was sitting alone, smoking and crying that day. I tried speaking to him but he would not respond to anything I said. I tried to get him to speak to me and to cheer up, but he threatened to kill himself."

"It is not just him or my husband. There are doctors and engineers being held in there. Neither they nor those without qualifications deserve to be treated like animals."



Remnants of the burnt buildings after the fire which was started by rioting detainees

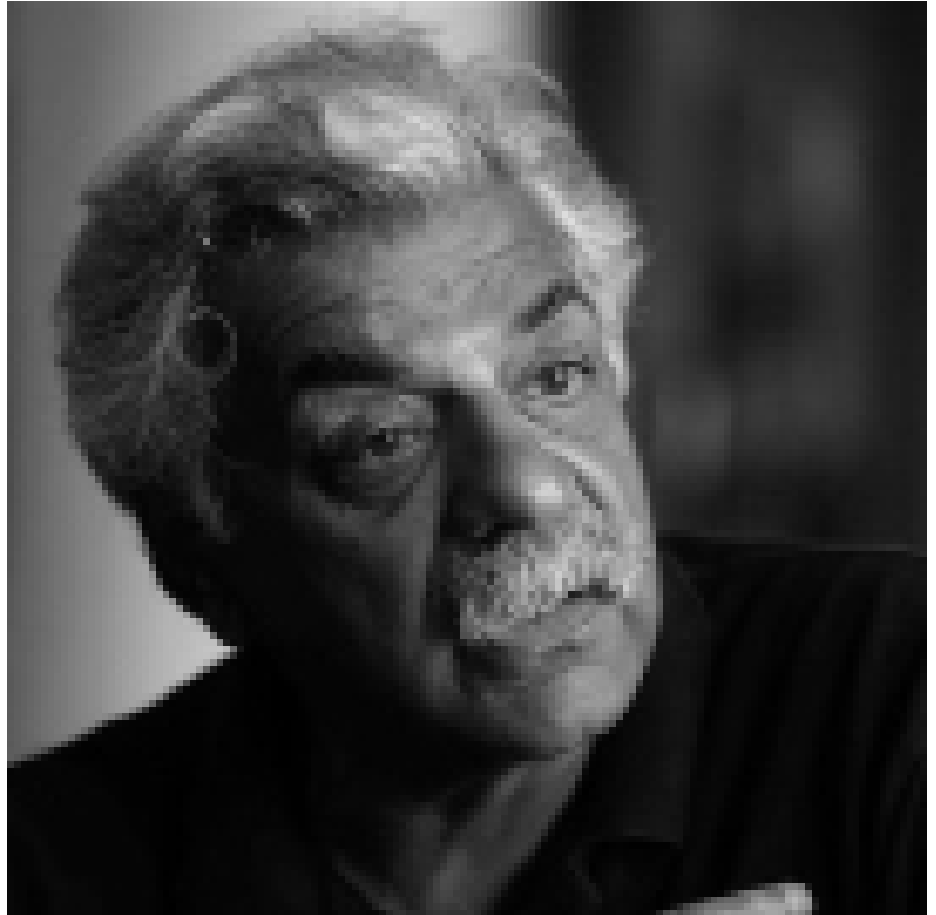
Tariq Ali lectures in New Zealand

Eli Boulton

The renowned leftist intellectual Tariq Ali, who is also a veteran of the uprising in France in May 1968, recently gave a series of public lectures at the University of Auckland as part of the yearly Sir Douglas Robb lecture series. Ali was an interesting choice as his chosen subject matter, 'Empire and Its Futures', was far more radical than the lecture series is usually acquainted with - previous lecturers have included the likes of the reactionary biological determinist Steven Pinker and bourgeois liberal economists such as Paul Krugman. This left a strange juxtaposition for all three lectures held, between its radical content and its thin veneer of bourgeois respectability - the last lecture was even chaired by the Vice Chancellor himself.

The local Auckland University branch of the Tertiary Education Union leafleted all three lectures, seemingly as a result of its considerable establishment connotations, an ironic site to behold if one is aware of Tariq Ali's roots in 1960's campus activism. However, to simply dismiss these lectures wholeheartedly for this one contradiction and accuse Ali for having 'sold out' on some abstract leftist ideal would be a crude and dogmatic way to address the significance and quality of these lectures. The fact people such as Tariq Ali are being given such a voice at all in such bourgeois domains is extremely positive, especially considering the relatively impoverished political discourse that exists in New Zealand. Ali did not hold back when it came to criticising our own government's involvement in Afghanistan and debunking claims that they are only there for humanitarian reasons, even going so far as to call the whole enterprise an imperialist one. What was even more surprising was the lack of any question from the audience in which he was questioned for his stance, which is interesting for a country where the dominant media message about New Zealand's involvement in Afghanistan paints a false picture of it being a purely humanitarian intervention and not one rooted in naked self-interest.

The lectures as a whole were of a very



Left intellectual Tariq Ali delivered a series of lectures in New Zealand in March

high standard, being split up into three general subject matters - the Islamic world, American imperialism and finally the rise of China. The first two lectures concerned material that many might be familiar with. The first lecture on Islam mostly was concerned with debunking unfortunately common racist myths about the Islamic world and pointed to various secular socialist movements that were crushed due to the involvement of American imperialism. It then went on to make an analysis of the recent uprisings sweeping the Middle East, a perspective which was backed up by Ali's own cultural background in the Islamic world. The second lecture was essentially a rough 'people's history' of the United States, with Ali using this to demonstrate how the United States has always been imperialist to some extent in its character. The third lecture on China was the most interesting of them all, due to his

inclusion of actual Chinese perspectives in his structural analysis of the country's government. This analysis led to quite a significant proportion of the lecture being devoted to how a socialist revolution can never really be truly successful without a strong democratic connection to the grassroots.

Luckily for those who could not make it to the lectures, all three lectures can be accessed in full on the Auckland University website:

http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoahome/about/news-events-and-notices/events/template/event_item.jsp?cid=11237

Revisiting socialism and women's liberation (part three)

The following is the final instalment of a three-part series by Kassie Hartendorp, organiser of the Wellington branch of the Workers Party. The Workers Party has decided to run a regular section on the subject of women's liberation in each issue of The Spark. The three instalments of this article are the first item published in this new regular section.

Love and Sexuality

Kollontai is especially known for her concept of 'free love'. It's a concept which isn't given its due analysis by Marxists because of its alleged irrelevance to the class struggle. Kollontai began with the premise that "the isolated family unit is the result of the modern individualistic world, with its rat-race, its pressures, its loneliness; the family is a product of the monstrous capitalist system." This summarises the effect that capitalism has on social relations (which may seem like an extreme view of urban life, but there is no doubt that many in the Western world can relate to this since the rise of neoliberalism).

In *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, Kollontai wrote that the move away from a collective to an individual society has led to a widespread "loneliness of spirit" where even though those in the cities are surrounded constantly by other people, we feel a sense of deep loneliness that can only be alleviated by finding our chosen loved one or 'soul-mate.' Kollontai believed when significant others are found, the capitalistic property relations affect the way they treat one-another, as if "extending the concept of property rights to include the right to the other person's whole spiritual and emotional world." She called this the 'sexual crisis' which is especially prominent in the way men are taught to view women, as the concept of marriage is thought to signify the possession of a wife. Often understated by Marxists, this is an example of how a society's social and productive relations impact on an aspect of life that seems completely removed from economic analysis. And bourgeois ideology holds that monogamous relationships and the idea of the soul-mate are 'natural', but they are of course historically specific concepts that are based on the underlying social and economic structures created by

the social conditions of that given time.

Kollontai also discusses the topic of sexuality which was then unexplored by Marxists, as well as most female authors for that matter. In a brief but controversial passage in her *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* Kollontai wrote that "the sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of a healthy organism, such as hunger and thirst" and that this phenomena must not be judged as moral or immoral.

Kollontai received a lot of condemnation for this progressive statement, with the most notable critic being Lenin. Misinterpreting Kollontai's point, he wrote that the theory of the satisfaction of sexual desires as being as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water under communist society, was completely "un-Marxist." However it appears that Kollontai is first and foremost challenging the cultural attitudes surrounding sex, saying that sexuality is natural and should not be considered shameful, as many of that period judged it to be. If Lenin had read more carefully, he would have seen that Kollontai did not support the idea of excessive sexual activity, but rather, that she believed a balance was necessary. She writes that sexual restraint should not be permitted (unless the person is not yet of a mature age), but as well as this, that too much sex could be harmful to the workers' collective. Kollontai was one of the only Marxists addressing sexuality as a political issue, after having read pioneering psychologists' work whilst in exile in 1918. At this time Lenin disapproved of her views on 'free love' and by 1923 they were denounced as 'bourgeois' and 'decadent.' Many contemporary Marxists continue to hold the standpoint that sexual politics are a mere distraction from the class struggle.

However, from a feminist perspective Kollontai's contributions on sexuality are extremely important as they offer an idea of communist sexual relations.

Kollontai's focal point in her analysis of romantic and sexual relations was that of the collective. She argued that the isolation of the "couple" as a special unit does not fit within the interests of communism, and that instead the strengthening of feelings of solidarity should be encouraged within the work collective. Young people should be taught firstly that love is only one aspect of life and that communist morality encourages "many and varied bonds of love and friendship among people." She writes that encouraging an expanded concept of love allows for greater intellectual and emotional development of the individual, which leads to more meaningful relationships with others, and ultimately has a positive impact on the collective as a whole.

This is a very radical notion of love that is focused entirely on the good of the collective, rather than the capitalist emphasis on the individual. It also comes from the belief that humans are not innately jealous or possessive, and rather that under different social and economic conditions, it is possible to have positive relationships. Where critics may say this is an idealistic approach to humanity, it is an example of the socialist view that the majority of people are not inherently selfish or malevolent, but our qualities are a construct that is shaped by the transient conditions of social existence. Kollontai's writing on love and sexuality is some of her most valued work, as such subjects were too often neglected by Marxists, yet these are obviously important issues.

In conclusion

Although women's suffrage was one of the most central demands of the first wave of feminism, within contemporary

Women's oppression

socialist theory, it was less significant. However, Clara Zetkin devoted a vast amount of time arguing for women's electoral rights. She believed that the political equality of women was necessary to bring about a social revolution that would ensure true equality for all. In the meantime, however, legislative reforms were acceptable as a means to a revolutionary end. Here lies the difference between bourgeois feminism and socialist feminism: the former's goal is to attain equality with men, and every suggestion for change is a reform within the overarching capitalist framework. Socialist feminists instead see inherent problems within the system, and aim to create a transformation of the very structural basis of society; with the end result being universal equality and the liberation of all.

Engels and Bebel made a historical analysis of the family, and the effects

that the rise of a productive surplus had on kinship ties. Both argued that the concentration of surplus wealth within the family and the establishment of private property led to the oppression of women, as did the abolition of matrilineal descent and the introduction of monogamy. The answer Engels proposed was for the movement of women's labour into the public sphere, which meant turning domestic labour into a social industry, so as to free up women's time. Although this was a valid solution to the 'marriage problem' and a step forwards toward women's emancipation, there are still issues within this topic that cannot always be adequately discussed through a strictly economic analysis.

Whilst the socialist analysis has clearly recognised unequal power relationships within the family under capitalism, sexual violence is yet to be

widely examined through a Marxist or economic framework. This is where more recent sociology and feminist theory can advance the analysis.

In regards to the motherhood problem Kollontai offered concrete solutions by way of legislative reform to help provide and protect both the mother and child. Perhaps reflecting the period, there was still a rigid adherence to traditional gender roles. Rather than encouraging men into the domestic sphere until capitalist relations are entirely broken, the idea centres on bringing women into public industry. Although socialising domestic labour and childcare is a plausible option after the revolution, in the meantime, we have seen women become overloaded as they are expected to function in both spheres. Here the tendency to focus on "after the revolution" answers to problems that need immediate attention is again found



Alexandra Kollontai, seated front left

Women's oppression

within Marxist analysis.

Lastly, Kollontai identified a problem with the current form of relationships and how they are based on the capitalistic concept of private property and possession. She challenged preconceived notions of the form a romantic relationship should take, and instead insists on a healthier idea of love, that creates a more positive and cohesive workers' collective. Furthermore, her views on sexuality are progressive for her time, as she writes that sex should not be seen as shameful, or immoral, but instead as a natural part of humanity. These contributions are still very important for developing proletarian theory.

Woman, just as any other oppressed group, could not, and cannot wait forever for the distant revolution. Instead cultural attitudes should continue to be challenged, just as long as the ultimate goal of a radical reorganisation of society's productive and social relations are not sacrificed or forgotten.

Please visit the March 2011 archive at workersparty.org.nz to read the whole article and to access sources.



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large

XL

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10-fitted

12-fitted

14 fitted

Privatising parts

Richard Meros

Lawrence and Gibson 2011

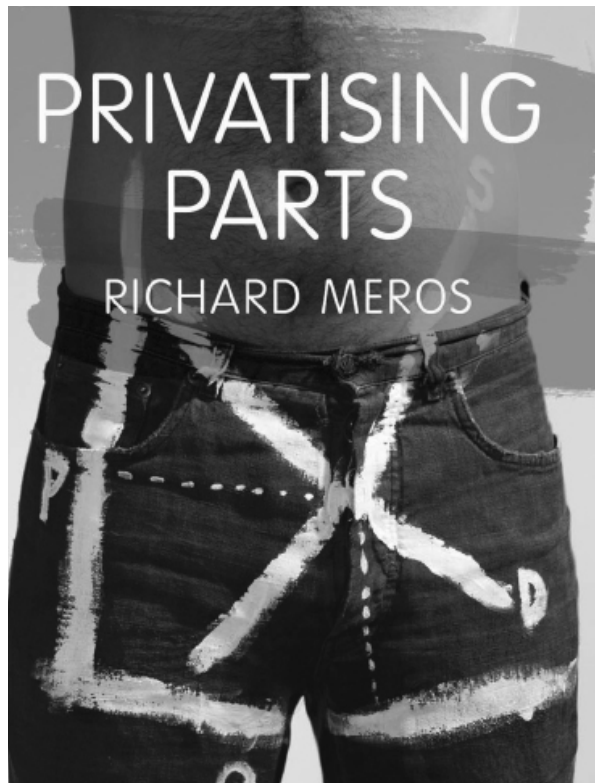
Reviewed by Joel Cosgrove, Workers Party Wellington Branch

“Who better than students to teach teachers what students ought to be taught?” so asks Richard Meros in his new fiction *Privatising Parts*. Quite simply this is a beautifully crafted piece of satire. On the surface this is a stinging critique of the far-right dwellers floating far out in the political stratosphere, think Muriel Newman, Roger Kerr etc. But this is not just a lampooning of the free-market logic taken to its extreme, it’s a satire of the underlying free-market logic itself.

For those unfamiliar with the work of Meros, he is the author of a number of independently produced books (so independent, that he takes part in the printing and binding himself). *On the Conditions and Possibilities of Helen Clark Taking Me as Her Young Lover*, and *Beggars and Choosers: The Complete Written Correspondence between Creative New Zealand and Richard Meros volume one* are amongst a slew of self-published titles.

Young Lover... was the breakout title, being successfully adapted to theatre and described by The Guardian as “skip[ing] between sociology, psychoanalysis and cringe-making erotica.” *Privatising Parts* picks up a couple of months after the 2008 general election, with Meros freedom camping and trying to escape the supposed backlash-permeating feral blogs and bitchy Labour Party cliques. He meets a hitchhiker and in an awkward conversation with Silence of the Lambs/Bufalo Bill undertones he proceeds to unleash his grief and sadness on being rejected as a young lover by Helen Clark.

This rejection has made it clear to him that “only the compulsion of a competitive market will sew up the aorta loopholes that perpetuate humankind’s recurring errors in love”. Meros proceeds



to outline the basis of this proposition.

The intimate sphere is neither a public or private sphere, but a personal one. Not governed by the laws of the market but also not overseen by the state. Huge amounts of emotional time and energy are wasted in the failed pursuit of intimate relations. The ultimate goal is for the competitive disciplines of the free market to provide the optimum outcomes for society as a whole. Or so it’s said.

But in order to enforce free-market discipline. You need information. This is because the failings of the current framework are due to a lack of information, of people thinking with their loins and not reason. The first step towards rationalising intimate relations along a more free-market framework, is for the Labour Party to nationalise the intimate relation into an SOE, Randycorp. Starting from an overwhelming faith in ‘progress’

Randycorp will manage intimate relations using rigorous, modern, scientific methods to most efficiently distribute the intimate relations of the population as a whole, not as a dating agency (which only deals with the dregs of society) or as a eugenics project (the aim being not to persecute or criminalise but to maximise total happiness).

The endpoint here is that what Labour nationalises, National then privatises. “Obviously there would be many companies like Randycorp and refinements would be made with experience, as occurs in any mixture of planned and free economies” says Meros, intentionally ignoring the glaring examples of the insurance or electricity industries and the method in which they collectively conspire to fuck over the unknowing consumer.

While this book is hilariously extreme in the manner it stretches the logic of privatisation to its limits, it is very much an attack at the core basis of the ideology and surface truisms that are put forward on a wider basis as an aspect of capitalist hegemony. In reality, situations that aren’t very much less outrageous than this are put forward as truths, on the basis of nothing much more than hack-pseudo-psychology e.g. the idea of perfect information, or the natural selfishness of people etc.

At the launch of the book, I gave a reading of the passage extolling the virtues of privatisation. Although put forward with the ideological inanity of a university debater, the book still drove the audience to stop the reading and argue. Even though a satire at its opening, the book is so borderline in its deep understanding of its subject, that it is more than believable. Which is kind of what makes it funny.

The Spark reformatted for 2011

The Workers Party's monthly magazine *The Spark* has undergone a number of presentation changes as of the issue published in the month of March this year. These changes include production of full colour cover (front and back) format, redesign of page 2, overall stylistic changes, an increase of size to regular 20 pages, and the introduction of a new monthly section on women's liberation.

We are pleased that we can now continue to circulate the only far-left monthly magazine

in New Zealand in an updated and attractive format. We intend to continue building circulation and developing a new subscription base amongst advanced elements of the working class and youth. You can read most articles online but subscribing to the paper allows for deeper reading, you get it every month, you can pass it on, and it's a good way to further support the dissemination of Marxist ideas in New Zealand. To subscribe please see p2



Selling the April issue of *The Spark* at Otara market, Auckland, above, and at Frankton market, Hamilton, left.



Workers Power 2011
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Workers Party
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3/4/5 June



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• Maori oppression
• Perspectives for the left

for updated schedule see www.workersparty.org.nz

Workers Power: national conference 2011, in Hamilton.

For full schedule see p10

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