

COMMUNISTS AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

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The Revolutionary Party
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The question of the revolutionary working class party has always been a source of contention and ideological struggle. The bourgeoisie in its efforts to maintain the workers under its domination naturally tries endlessly to isolate and destroy a genuine revolutionary party.

In Australia the ruling capitalist class, its ideologists and the monopoly owned mass media continue their anti-communist campaign day in and day out. In the first four decades from the twenties to the fifties communists were portrayed as unwashed, unshaven terrorists with knife in teeth and bomb in hand. There was a temporary relaxation during World War II when the Soviet Union was our ally in the struggle against fascism. In the sixties and seventies this picture became no longer tenable but this did not mean that the aim of the bourgeoisie changed. Their tactics became more subtle - from a direct frontal attack the battle shifted more and more to the ideological sphere. The theory of the revolutionary party was attacked - a trojan horse tactic so to speak.

Marxism-Leninism has always had to contend with efforts to undermine it ideologically, to extract its essence and leave it a flabby, liberal, reformist, useless jellyfish. How many times has Marx been debunked and Leninism declared a dogma or out of date? In how many countries have theories of exceptionalism been proclaimed inevitably developing into concepts of "independence", meaning in essence, independence from Marxism-Leninism, and independence from the revolutionary proletarian struggle.

The communists of Australia have neither escaped the frontal attacks including a period of illegality, nor the attention of those who would revise Marxism-Leninism out of existence.

Is a revolutionary party needed in Australia and what should its role be?

Australia has a developed capitalist economy and a powerful bourgeois state machine.

Monopolies and multi-national corporations dominate the economy. There is no feudal past in our history, no massive impoverished peasantry, a relatively small population in a country of large size and rich resources.

The working class, that is wage earners who do not own any of the means of production, is numerically large. It has been possible for the ruling class, faced with the many actions of the workers to make concessions as it builds up the economy as its undivided property. Repeated concessions even though wrung from the employing class in many struggles, has created many illusions and, in particular, strengthened reformism.

The capitalist state apparatus reaches into the furthest corners and efficiently carries out the dictates of the monopolies. On every occasion that a Labor government makes some, even moderately, progressive appointment to any part of the State apparatus there is a tremendous outcry about "jobs for the boys". The ruling class regards such appointments as its sacred right and it does not stand on ceremony in appointing its "boys" to every court, to the army and police and to every other important instrumentality of the state. If any appointment fails to carry out the dictates of the system within reasonable limits they are sacked, relieved or otherwise neutralised. We have had one such example in the recent hobbling of Mr. Justice Staples.

The very logic of economic development, trade, communications and so on, brought larger and larger monopolies and multi-nationals commanding great economic empires. The rising revolutionary movement of the workers under the slogan 'Workers of all countries, unite' was also a factor obliging the capitalists to join together to defend their class interests.

The Australian ruling class since 1788 have maintained relations of class solidarity, even if as junior partner, first with British imperialism and more recently with the US through the American alliance. This alliance fetters our sovereignty and independence and in the nuclear age endangers our very survival.

However, the main point to be made is that the capitalist machine, economically, politically, ideologically and organisationally is strong, very class conscious and in no mind to voluntarily depart the scene.

The Whitlam Labor Government found this out when it began to act in a manner threatening the global strategy of imperialism to which the Liberal-NCP coalition of this country subscribe.

One of the lessons of the removal of the Labor Government was that despite its electoral backing, despite the existence of a powerful trade union movement giving, in the main, consistent support to the Labor Party, they were unable to prevent the coup. In fact they did very little to stop the march of the Fraser jackboot either before or after, November 11, 1975.

We repeat these self-evident facts today, the same reality which led to the formation of the Communist Party of Australia 60 years ago. In its Manifesto to the Workers of Australia published in the first issue of The Australian Communist and dated December 24, 1920 the Party said:-

"The bourgeoisie by virtue of its possession of the State power, established, and maintains itself today as the dominant class, (and shelters) behind the empty phrases of popular democracy." The Communist Party, "sets itself to abolish the system, to overthrow this class monopoly and to abolish the private ownership of the means of production...The new machine which will be established by the organised force of the workers in mass action, for the protection of the new order in the establishment of its new economic and social system, will be the dictatorship of the proletariat."

It went on to call for the establishment of communist groups "wherever possible, strictly on the principles outlined in this program".

If, in the following 60 years the Communist Party has not lived up to these noble aims it is not the fault of the forming members and the program outlined in the Party's very first Manifesto.

Nor have the aims of the Manifesto been superseded by any events in this country. On the contrary, the experience of the labour movement confirms at every step the efficacy of communist theory.

We can add to this the experiences of other countries which show that socialism has only been successfully built where a Marxist-Leninist Party existed with the capacity to lead the working class to power and then build the new society which is an even more difficult and complex task.

What is needed in Australia is a revolutionary party capable of leading the masses into battle against state-monopoly capitalism and imperialism, a party capable of dispossessing the capitalist class of its power and taking over, as public property, its economic strongholds, establishing the working

class as the ruling class which must exercise its political leadership of the nation and build the new socialist society.

The ideological foundation of such a party, that is Marxism-Leninism, has been long established and confirmed by decades of practice. The organisational principles have also been confirmed. They are, democratic centralism.

It is time that this ideological base and these organisational principles were clearly reaffirmed. Undoubtedly there are those who think, or hope, that socialism can be won without a hard struggle, by reforming capitalism out of existence or by some application of liberalism or "left" radicalism, but this is sheer illusion and self-deception.

It is, of course, true that each country has its particular, individual characteristics, historical and cultural background, labour movement experiences and traditions and these have to be taken into account. It is wrong, however, to exaggerate them to the point where the generalities of class struggle which are common to all class societies are lost sight of. It is the generalities which provide the fundamentals; it is the individual characteristics which are secondary.

The relationship to the means of production, the private ownership of the means of production and the social nature of production, the fact of exploitation, the class nature of society are features common to all capitalist states whether it be US, Uruguay, Turkey, India or Australia. The capitalist ruling class will act the same and the working class must fight in fundamentally the same way every-where. Once there were illusions in Chile that because of long traditions of bourgeois democracy and the non-involvement of the army in political affairs that these were absolutes for all classes in Chilean society, including the monopoly ruling class. Pinochet savagely shattered these illusions. There is no room for them in Australia either. The bourgeoisie will fight no less stubbornly in Australia than in Germany, Britain or Chile.

Let us cherish the achievements of our democratic struggles, against convictism, for the right to organise, for the right of free speech and assembly, for full adult franchise, and honour the heroes of Eureka, and yes, swear to stand truly by each other in the fight against oppression as they did. But, let us have no illusions that the ruling class gave these gains voluntarily or will not attempt to snatch them away just as soon as we start to use them in a manner which threatens their continued mastery.

It is therefore a mistake in my view to so exaggerate our national characteristics to the point where we see them as primary and the generalities of class society and capitalist domination as secondary. This is the path that leads to nationalism.

This is also the path that leads to an exaggerated emphasis on independence. Just as we may ask, "democracy for whom?" so we must ask, "independence from what?" If "independence" is advanced as an absolute principle, over-riding all others, we end up with some strange bed-fellows. In certain circumstances the imperialists become advocates of independence. They were behind the "independence" of Biafra some years ago. They are for the "independence" of the Baltic Republic from the Soviet Union. They are for the "independence" of communist parties one from the other, the better to isolate each revolutionary contingent. That is why they brand the Socialist Party of Australia today as a Moscow party and as they used to brand the CPA - once upon a time.

Independence advanced in a one-sided way can also become "independence" from Marxism-Leninism. There are some in the left who brand Marxism-Leninism as a soulless dogma, repeating in fact the slanders of the ideologists of the ruling class. There is no reason to expect anything else from the enemies of Marxism but it is not necessary to repeat what they say.

It also becomes a means by which other ideologies can be advanced as legitimate revolutionary theories - Marcuse, Danny the Red, Mao or Trotsky. In these circumstances the tried and proven ideology of Marxism-Leninism becomes not "the" guide to action but one of a number of revolutionary trends. In pursuit of "independence" Marxism-Leninism becomes "marxism" and everyone can proclaim themselves a "marxist".

This exaggerated, one-sided promotion of "independence" is in fact a reflection of the individualism of the petty-bourgeoisie who really aspire to become big capitalists one day and hence reject the discipline and solidarity of the working class but who, especially in times like the present, are increasingly oppressed by monopoly and revolt against it. But their revolt is not one which in the first place, leads them to clearly and unreservedly identify with the working class.

The question of independence is put in its correct setting in the main document adopted by the world meeting of communist and workers' parties held in 1969. In elaborating the relationships between fraternal communist parties it said they are "based on the principles of proletarian internationalism, solidarity, and mutual support, respect for independence and equality, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs". (Tasks at the present stage of the struggle against imperialism and united action of the Communist and Workers' Parties and all anti-imperialist forces. Section IV. Par. 2).

The order of their presentation is not without its significance. To neglect any one of these principles inevitably ends in error.

One final word about independence. It is most often used in the context of discussion about relations with other socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union and in the context of discussion about "dogmatic" or "narrow" ideology, meaning Marxism-Leninism. It is not asserted in connection with bourgeois politics or ideology.

For example, there is a leaflet which reported the discussion at a meeting to consider the formation of a Socialist Club at a University. The general consensus was that a club was needed "not linked to any political party or narrow ideology". There are no prizes for guessing which ideology is regarded here as "narrow", yet above all others, Marxism-Leninism has a world outlook.

We have no hesitation in speaking about the leading role of a Marxist-Leninist Party. This concept has nothing to do with elitism, conceit, commandism, authoritarianism or such characteristics which are alien to our ideology. These charges are, however, often made against a communist party which upholds the concept of the leading role. The aim is to have such a party abandon its positions rather than any genuine concern about elitism.

The concept of "leading role" arises from the adoption of the ideology of scientific socialism, of dialectical and historical materialism, the application and use of which enables a communist party to analyse in an objective manner the social forces at work, their development, consequences and so on.

The progress of society does not proceed in an anarchist manner. Human society is as much governed by laws as are all other things in nature. The great achievement of Marx was that he, together with Engels, discovered these laws and unified them into a single theory. It is use of this knowledge which, if properly applied, enables communists to chart the way ahead, organise and lead the struggles of the masses along a course which will end the capitalist system.

I do not think there are many if any in this audience who do not subscribe to the concept of the working class being that class which has the revolutionary task of ending capitalism. It is therefore the leading class in this struggle, the grave-diggers of capitalism.

For this reason too, the party of the working class assumes a vanguard position in the class struggle.

It is these considerations alone which enables us to justifiably use the terms "vanguard" and "leading role".

To abandon this concept merely because there are examples of elitism, authoritarianism or conceit is once again to abandon the fundamental by using secondary excuses.

At the turn of the century when the first Marxist party was coming into existence, Lenin argued out the ideological position and the organisational principles for a party of socialist revolution.

The kind of party needed is determined by its aims.

If the aim is no more than reforms within the system then a loosely organised, ideologically and politically diverse party is good enough. It will be able to include in its ranks quite comfortably those who are concerned only to knock the rough edges off capitalism, to curb its excesses rather than end it. It will also include those who aspire to socialism but think (or hope) it can be achieved by legislative means, winning a majority in parliament and persuading the capitalists to move over by use of superior reason.

If we are for socialism and come to accept the reality that capitalism is not going to voluntarily "give over", then we will have to look for another sort of party.

No-one would send a boy scout brigade to fight a war and no-one is entitled to think that a loosely organised and politically divided party can overturn a determined, well-organised and armed capitalist class.

Consequently communist parties have given emphasis to strict organisational principles, to democratic centralism, which provides for a centralised leadership of professional revolutionaries while exercising strict democratic procedures, listening to and learning from the masses, accountability of higher organisations to lower organisations, a combination of rights and duties of members, the minority being bound by the majority decisions, elections of leaderships and so on.

A revolutionary party cannot permit organised factions. If it did its political and organisational unity would always be at risk.

Another means by which the fighting unity of a communist party may be jeopardised is by the introduction of ideological pluralism, by such concepts as "unity in diversity" and letting a hundred flowers (or were they weeds?) bloom.

I am not talking here about this question as it might apply to society as a whole but to a revolutionary party.

There are only two basic philosophies - idealism and materialism and all ideological expression is a reflection of one or the other. There are a number of formulations in circulation which in essence are nothing more than attempts to infiltrate idealist thinking into materialism.

When we hear talk about "improving Marxism", about "the new left", "flexibility", "ideological toleration", "innovations", "new approaches", and so on we will find that they are attempts to water down and revise Marxism-Leninism.

One critic of Marxism in Australia wrote that "no unitary theory is possible" ("Philosophy for an Exploding World", E. Aarons p. 148) and then concluded that "Pluralism has come to stay in political commitment" (Ibid p.152). Perhaps this is meant to sound like a new discovery. In any case it hardly suggests partisanship in the struggle to overcome bourgeois ideology and uphold Marxism. The end result of this "new" thinking is illustrated by the following sentence, "Industrially advanced Western society has enough radically new features itself to require the closest scrutiny before adopting models from elsewhere". (Ibid p. 151). This was written in 1972 before the present capitalist world-wide economic crisis broke in all its devastating fury but at a time when the general crisis of capitalism was more and more apparent.

The acceptance of ideological pluralism into a revolutionary working class party can only lead to its degeneration and disunity, rendering it incapable of meeting the needs of the struggle for socialism. If allowed to go unchecked it will result in a steady undermining and then abandonment of Marxism-Leninism. Bourgeois ideology, which is idealism, is much stronger in our society at present and will triumph even in a communist party unless constantly fought against. Lack of principles then becomes a principle, not to be regarded as a serious disease but a virtue, the party becomes a debating society, factionalism becomes an accepted thing, Marxism-Leninism becomes just one of a number of equal theories and the party itself, just one of a number of parties forming an amorphous movement or coalition.

Nothing in the foregoing is to be taken as limiting the necessity and possibility of labour movement unity in the struggle against monopoly and imperialism. The Marxist view holds that in the final analysis it is the masses which make history. In Australia and on a world scale, the masses are truly on the march. The winds of change are blowing into every corner of the globe. Even the remote islands of Micronesia are affected - the imperialists would say, infected.

There are a multitude of demands advanced by the working class and other progressive elements in society. Communists believe that the unification of all these forces directed against the enemy, state-monopoly capitalism and imperialism is a cornerstone of revolutionary strategy.

Our aim is to merge into a single stream the wide range of movements, political trends and organisations and give the struggle a maximum of purpose. In the course of joint actions the anti-imperialist and anti-

monopoly front will become stronger organisationally and politically. Experience and political education will show the necessity of proceeding to the socialist transformation of society.

The task of giving this movement a single common direction in the class struggle, of coordinating the activities of a multitude of organisations can only be effected by a Marxist-Leninist political party. The political leadership of the party, which is the highest form of class organisation, should be extended to all other class organisations.

There are a multitude of class organisations and other progressive groups all with relatively limited aims. Not any one of them can provide overall leadership to the working class. The party sets out to win acceptance by the non-party organisations of the party's political leadership. When a fighting unity has been achieved and the whole class is marching down the street as one great stream - then the question of socialist transformation will be on the agenda.

But before that can happen there needs to be a Marxist-Leninist party strong in ideology, purpose and organisation. Sixty years ago a small band commenced that task. It has been a tortuous road during which it could have been often said - one step forward, two steps back.

The best, the most productive years of the CPA were those during which the party was guided by the fundamental concepts contained in the original Manifesto and when it maintained relations of solidarity with the Communist International and, following the Comintern's disbandment, with the international communist movement. The course of revisionism of so-called "innovation" and "new" ideas has brought decline and division.

The urgent and decisive tasks of the eighties demands that the question of the revolutionary party be solved.

This short contribution attempts to outline some of the principles that the Socialist Party of Australia adheres to and which we firmly believe are necessary for the socialist transformation of Australian society.

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