

COMMUNISTS AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

MELBOURNE, 22, 23, 24 AUGUST, 1980

CONTRIBUTION ON THE SUBJECT: The formation of the Socialist Party of Australia.

By: P. Clancy,
President,
Socialist Party of Australia

23rd August, 1980.

There are many in our society who would agree with the characterisation of capitalist society as a society in a state of degeneration and decay, one which imposes hardship, misery and suffering upon tens of millions of people, and offers little but the prospect of increasing misery and hardship, at the same time threatening mankind with horrors of chemical, bacteriological and nuclear warfare.

It is equally sure that these many (although not nearly enough yet) would agree that we need a new form of society, a new economic order, one that will solve the problems of rapidly advancing technological change in ways that will benefit the working people and offer new and richer perspectives for mankind.

Achievement of socialism is the historic mission of the working class, the only consistently revolutionary class, and for this great task the working class needs a Party of like minded people, guided by the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism.

The Socialist Party of Australia aspires to be such a Party and proudly asserts that it is the only Party in Australia which declares itself to be based upon the theory of Marxism-Leninism, the only Party in Australia which consistently adheres to the principles of proletarian internationalism and works consistently to achieve the united front of the working class against monopoly capitalism.

The Socialist Party of Australia came into existence in 1971 because of the objective fact that a communist party based upon Marxist-Leninist principles of proletarian internationalism had ceased to exist in Australia.

For almost five decades of its existence the Communist Party of Australia had stood firmly by international communist principles and had justly earned a high reputation for its work in Australia and its firmness of international principle on international questions.

However, during the sixties the Party moved sharply away from its working class and theoretical base, moved to a nationalist rather than internationalist line, adopted a disuniting role in the internationalist communist movement and began to descend on the slippery path of anti-Sovietism.

Edgar Ross, well known class writer and member of the Central Committee of the CPA, in his speech to the 22nd Congress in March, 1970 described the position the CPA had arrived at as being "a hotch potch of reformism, anarcho-syndicalism, trotskyism and libertarianism."

This very apt summation makes it clear that by the beginning of the 70s the objective need had arisen for the rebirth of a party based on Marxism-Leninism, one which aimed to restore to Australia a party which would stand firmly with the international communist movement, would stand firmly by the principles of proletarian internationalism.

Since its formation the Socialist Party of Australia has worked to develop its understanding of the correct application of the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the realities of Australian society, has sought to unite the working class in the struggles for peace and social progress, has aimed to build the united front of the working class in struggle against monopoly capitalism.

The very first slogan of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels was the one that is as topical today as when first written in 1948, that is, "workers of all lands unite".

The question might well be asked that if one agrees with that basic slogan why then arose the necessity for a division in the communist movement in the 60s and 70s.

The answer to this question is complex, and deserves the detailed attention of all interested in the development of communist theory and organisation.

It can be said that the basic reasons for the formation of the SPA are:-

- * The SPA believes very strongly in the necessity of the united front of the working class in the struggle against monopoly capitalism and the CPA in the 60s moved away from this concept.

-
- * The SPA firmly adheres to the principle of proletarian internationalism, of international working class solidarity, giving support to the many struggles for national liberation, to development of working class solidarity in the struggle between socialism and capitalism, to strong opposition to narrow nationalism, and the CPA in the 60s adopted the stand of nationalism as opposed to proletarian internationalism and adopted a line of hostility to the socialist countries and to the world communist movement.

 - * The SPA gives full support to the policy of peaceful co-existence, disarmament and detente and believes in the development of the broad peace movement in support of all the points of the UN opposition to imperialist war and in the 60s the CPA moved from the concept of the development of the broad peace movement into regional type, narrowing forms of peace activity.

 - * The SPA bases itself upon a class understanding of the roll of the state as enunciated by Lenin and the CPA in the 60s adopted a petty bourgeois, non-class approach to the state adopting a right opportunist line of "pure" democracy, of non-class democracy, ignoring the correct understanding of the role of the state.

 - * The SPA believes that the party must be based upon the working class giving firm leadership to the class and its allies and the CPA in the 60s abandoned that role and took the position of being one of a whole group of petty bourgeois "left" organisations.

Those who formed the Socialist Party of Australia consisted of experienced working class activists from various fields of endeavour and included many who held leading positions in the trade union movement, in the womens and peace movements and included former Communist Party officials of capacity and experience.

They had been actively engaged in struggle against the movement away from Marxist-Leninist policy and ideology that had been evident in the Communist Party from the mid 60s.

After the decline and departure of former CPA General Secretary, L. L. Sharkey, the new leadership moved to embrace various left and right opportunist lines, to draw trotskyites into the leadership of the Communist Party, adopt a line of hostility to the ~~whole~~^{World} communist movement and moved for a more and more open anti-Soviet position, more in line with the bourgeois detractors of socialism than working class leaders.

This hostility to the Soviet Union continued after the formation of the Socialist Party of Australia, as is evidenced by the events associated with an official visit of a CPA delegation to Moscow in 1973.

While there the CPA delegation had discussions with the top leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and reached agreement upon a joint communique which, among other things, said:-

"The CPA delegation noted with pleasure, during its stay in Moscow, new achievements of the Soviet people in implementing their program of communist construction and welcomes the peace initiatives of the USSR in the international arena."

After reaching agreement in Moscow on the communique the delegation returned to Australia, a National Committee Meeting was convened and the communique was repudiated, an action which constituted a break by the CPA of its relationships with the CPSU.

The first main departure in Marxism and Leninism was of a right opportunist character, this being expressed in the approach of the CPA to the role of the State.

In the draft of the Democratic Rights Charter put forward for adoption by the CPA, concepts were advanced of a capitalist state which departed markedly from the Marxist theory of the State.

Capitalism in Australia was defined as a well functioning democracy, with the judiciary being described as an independent judiciary.

This concept was advanced even though at that period the Australian working class was campaigning vigorously against the use of penal powers against trade unions, against workers struggles, and tens of thousands of dollars of fines were being imposed on trade unions engaging in ordinary trade union activity.

The so-called independent judiciary was busy handing out these fines, penalising the workers for ordinary trade union activities.

Swinging away from this right wing opportunist line the CPA leaders moved to an ultra left position engaging in events like the urban guerrilla occupation of the stock exchange (for about one hour) and attempting to impose ultra left tactics on the trade union movement, using the NSW Branch of the Builders' Labourers' Federation as the vehicle for the ultra left theories.

The adoption of the ultra left line in the NSW Builders' Labourers appeared to have some spectacular early results but ultimately led to the complete defeat of the CPA leadership and the assumption of power in the union by the Maoist forces.

Attacks were made upon the standing of various trade union leaders who held positions in the Party, some of these attacks were open, some were snide.

As part of the preparation for an ultra-left line in the trade union movement an all out attack was made against trade union officials generally declaring them to be conservative, seeking to push trade union comrades on to a so-called "revolutionary" line, a left sectarian adventurist line which had proved so disastrous in past periods.

The general line adopted by the leadership was to polarise opponents, to single them out for attack and isolation, a method of work which could have no other result but to disunite and split the Party.

False slogans were raised such as "that some comrades wanted unity for unity's sake" in ridiculing the basic principle of unity of the working class movement.

The method of polarisation and conduct of the process of handling different viewpoints by confrontation methods meant that many good comrades, who normally would be working unitedly together, were propelled into sharp polemical arguments.

The completely wrong method of handling differences of opinion adopted by the CPA leadership led them to reject proposals by a large body of comrades that there should be a unity commission, that there should be a genuine attempt to properly resolve differences within the Party.

The rejection of the proposal for the unity commission was accompanied by statements telling the opposition to get out and form their own Party.

It became increasingly clear that the only way that Marxism-Leninism was to be preserved and continued as a force in the working class movement was the formation of a Party basing itself upon the proven scientific socialist theory of Marxism-Leninism.

The SPA aims to continue the fine tradition and principles of the Communist Party, it sees itself as the continuer of the best traditions of the Communist Party, as the organisation which carries forward the firm proletarian internationalist line.

We fully recognise that socialism must be won by the efforts of the working class in our country, that the form of socialism must be one which accords with the history, customs and traditions of the Australian people and is in a form fully acceptable to the Australian working class and its allies.

But we are also very fully aware that imperialist reaction seeks to crush the socialist revolution won in the various countries, as is evidenced in the tragic Chile events, and international support and solidarity are essential for the maintenance of socialist power once it is won.

Hence we are internationalists, giving our support to the struggles of the working people and their allies in all countries and drawing upon the rich experience of the world socialist movement in its struggles against imperialism, for social and economic progress and world peace.

We declare our intention to work in unity with all progressive forces in Australia and have demonstrated this in many ways, including the discussions and joint statement with the Communist Party made very recently.

It is particularly important the circumstances presently existing, where imperialism is engaging in more and more war provocations, is extending war bases to various parts of the world, is threatening the world with nuclear war.

Now more than ever the forces of the left need to recognise that the first priority is to develop the widest united front of all progressive forces in our country, to unite for the defeat of the Fraser Government and the policies it represents, for united action against monopolies, national and multinational, and for the forging of the broadest and most active anti-war movement.

In the course of united work for common objectives ideological questions can continue to be discussed and efforts continue to be made to find the best form of applying Marxist-Leninist theories to the realities of Australia.

Application of a policy of action on agreed issues, coupled with continuation of ideological discussion with mutual respect for each others position could provide the basis for a strong communist movement in the 1980s.

We believe that an objective analysis and discussion of the lessons of the 60s and 70s combined with an objective and basic analysis of the realities of the struggle between socialism and imperialism in today's world can lead to a strengthening of the working class movement in the immediate future.

* * * * *